

ALL THE BRAVE RIFLES

CLARKE VENABLE









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*A Romance of the Days When "Old Sam"
Houston, Stephen F Austin, David
Crockett, James Bowie, and a
Gallant Company of Freeman
Won for Texas the
Bright Star of In-
dependence.*

ALL THE BRAVE RIFLES

by

CLARKE VENABLE



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ALL THE BRAVE RIFLES

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To

F. K. R.

Companion, Counselor, Friend.



To a Benefactor

My Dear Doctor:

You will recall that evening, years ago, when I first came into your home, a dusty, weary trooper doing duty on the Texas borderland. At dusk we sat on your wide verandah, discussing the part Texas had played in the development of the West. Your vivid portrayal of certain dramatic episodes in that history prompted the questions: "What lured those early settlers westward? Did they have any idea of the glory of their roles?"

You replied: "They were sports of the winds of chance and Fate marshalled the winds. How else can we account for the destinies of such men as Sam Houston, self-exiled governor of Tennessee; Dave Crockett, Tennessean, woodsman, Congressman, hunter and restless adventurer; James Bowie, fighter and firebrand; Austin, gentleman, colonist and wise administrator—all these caught up by the little whirlwinds of chance and hurled into the vortex of the tornado in Texas. But," you added, "back of that, far back, were motivating circumstances equally dramatic but now obscured by the mists of time."

In support of this latter statement you brought from your desk an old sheepskin envelope, wrinkled and yellowed by age. You alone know what other priceless documents that old envelope contained, but the one letter which you showed me fired my imagination and marked the beginning of a long search for the unknown and the obscure.

That letter, coming down to you through a long line of antecedents, contained a tragic recital. It gave but a glimpse into the life of John Summers, Virginian, but it was a glimpse of what must have been one of the high moments of his life.

Consider the emotions that must have swept him as he steeled his hand to write those fateful words: "This letter will reach your hands after I have met Captain Roup on the field of honour. If I escape his fire and he falls, then I must flee to the wilderness with my bride of the day, there to start anew in a new land, where, however great our labours and hardships, we will at least escape the yoke and tyranny of our oppressors. It may be that I go to oblivion, but I go with honour. If I fall in to-morrow's encounter, I commend to your tender care and watchfulness the lovely Prudence Ransome, widowed a short twelve hours after our marriage. For some reason, beyond the compass of my vision, the Fates have entered to disturb our planned course and shape our destinies. My richest recompense is in the thought that, whatever the outcome, I have chosen a wife of courage. Man has no greater fortune."

What else? What sequel? Had his life ended there? Had "lovely Prudence Ransome" paid for her devotion with lifelong tears? How had that letter spanned a hundred and fifty years and half a continent to find a resting place in that old sheepskin envelope? If only you could give a fragment more.

You shook your head—the least satisfying of all answers. Your reluctance to engage in conjecture provoked the remark that could we but complete the record we might have a tale worth the telling, even should certain gaps require fiction.

"Mixing history and fiction," you replied, "is not unlike hitching a spirited horse with an ox. The one goes swiftly and sometimes dangerously, while the other moves with a sure-footed certainty that takes no thought of time. The ox would have to be goaded."

Even so, that letter was the vivid fragment compelling the search to complete the whole pattern. Needless to say, in that search the bright thread in the warp often ended at a hole made in the fabric by the decay of time. But it wanted

repair, even if need be on the loom of imagination and with threads not always nicely matched.

One may imagine the unrecorded, but he must not change the basic facts. In making use of those who have truly lived there are times when the hand becomes palsied with misgivings; moments when even a moderate sense of justice stands in doubt. Those men from out the past stand over you and say, "Have a care, sir!"

As a man of science you will agree that care is degreed by capabilities; as a romanticist you will not greatly mind if now and then the ox is goaded. Certainly you will be interested in the proof of your words—"They were sports of the winds of chance."

My debt to you, my dear Doctor, is not so much for the temporary warmth of your house and the bread of your board, as it is for the fact that you whetted my appetite with a crumb and gave me some work to do. You, at least, will forget the inconsequential matter of time in order to get at the beginning, which, I believe, was somewhat after the fashion outlined in Book One.

Clarke Venable
Chicago, 1929

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BOOK ONE :PRELUDE



ALL THE BRAVE RIFLES

Chapter One

JOHN SUMMERS OF VIRGINIA

I

THREE officers of the King's Colonial Army sat drinking in the low-ceilinged taproom of the old Williamsburg Tavern. They sprawled in their chairs, heavy and sodden. The tongue of the bulbous-nosed captain had become too thick to follow the sprightly wit of his fellows, but his hand could still follow theirs to the glasses.

"Come, Captain," urged one of the others, "give us that song about the soldier and the barmaid."

The captain frowned, trying hard to recall the words, then shook his head moodily.

"So," taunted the first speaker, "it is true that the Captain's heart is heavy? I have heard it said that it would not be easy for him to witness Prudence Ransome's marriage to that young lad John Summers."

The captain frowned again, his thick lips pouting in slow movement as he attempted to form reply.

"How could it be?" spoke up the third officer, a young captain on the Governor's staff. "Is she not pretty? And here old Harry has been quartered in her home for over a year, only to see her go to another man the day after to-morrow." He pounded the table with his open

palm. "Here, landlord! Bring us some wine. This rotten ale of yours has made old Harry's heart heavy."

The drunken captain lurched forward across the table and wagged his finger under the speaker's nose. Thick-tongued, thick-witted, he made an obscene boast. The rotund little innkeeper, who had come forward for the glasses, bristled with indignation.

"Have a care, sir!" he warned. "It is a lady of whom you speak."

The captain turned slowly and leered at him, his head wagging. "Be off, you pot-bellied rebel! Your ears are too long. Be careful you do not lose them."

The little innkeeper retreated with the glasses.

A few minutes later a young colonial entered the room by a door somewhat out of the line of vision of the three officers. He greeted the innkeeper cheerily and stood talking with him. At last, noting that they were unobserved, the pudgy little landlord edged closer to the newcomer and began whispering in his ear. A cautious finger indicated the three men at the table.

The young man wheeled, his face crimson with rage.

"Which one?" he demanded, no longer guarding his voice.

"Now, now, John! Not so loud!" The flustered little man tried vainly to place himself in a position to cloak the youth, lifting himself up on his toes in the futile effort.

With a sweep of the arm the other brushed him aside and striding across the room faced the three officers.

"Captain Roup," his voice was crisp, challenging attention, "since you have been housed for a year by

Prudence Ransome's father, perhaps you will feel obligated to inform me if she has here any defamers."

Even the wine failed to keep color in Captain Roup's face. He glanced appealingly at his brother officers. Their confusion betrayed the truth.

With a swift movement John Summers jerked the officer to his feet.

"It does not matter who spoke the lie," he said. "It is enough that you failed to rebuke it." With an open hand he struck the captain across his puffy lips.

Staggering back, the dazed captain made a clumsy effort to draw his sword. That instant the two other officers, not so deep in their cups, sprang between the two antagonists.

John Summers stood his ground. "I am unarmed, you see," he said, "but I will arm myself, at any time and at any place that will suit the Captain's convenience. And I eagerly await his pleasure."

Head high, chin set, he turned and walked from the room.

The little innkeeper stood wringing his hands.

2

To strike a King's officer was an overt act entailing grave consequences. It would have resulted in John Summers being forthwith dragged before a military tribunal had not Captain Harry Roup, the offended party, decided to take matters in his own hands and avenge the insult in a manner becoming a soldier.

The following morning he moved his personal effects

from the home of Peter Ransome and took up quarters in the old tavern. His pretext was mumbled and incoherent; his farewells not as gracious as might be expected from one who had been extended every consideration and made most comfortable at a time when all other officers were complaining of acts that clearly portrayed a rebellious antagonism to their presence.

That afternoon John Summers came slowly up the path to the Ransome home. His head was hung in thought and his feet were far too heavy for a man who in little more than twenty-four hours would climb this same path to his wedding.

A familiar call came from the double row of blossoming apple trees to the right of the path. He halted and looked up. Prudence Ransome stood under one of the trees, her face as pink as any falling petal. In times past her call had always quickened him into a run, but to-day his feet lagged as a truant's. Woman's sure divination made her say:

"Why, John! What is the trouble?"

Mutely he took both her hands in his. Her blue eyes met his, searchingly, and the faintest hint of a tear, born of the fear known to every bride-to-be, gave her eyes an added depth and sparkle. He stooped, crushed her hands to his lips, and then placing one of those hands under his arm, turned to walk under the trees in lagging pursuit of enough courage to tell her what must be told.

His courage was less than his resolution but at last he told her, covering up the issue as best he could and, after unwittingly stunning her with fear and dread,

laughed in strained gayety as he made a feeble effort to calm her fears. But Prudence Ransome was a creature of love, and therefore a creature of panic. Round-eyed, voiceless, she watched his face for some hint that would betray a terribly cruel jest. Tears welled in her eyes and were held there by her determination not to give way to the panic of a stupid dream. It must be a dream! Let him talk on; the sound of his voice must in time awaken her . . .

"But John," she heard her own voice making a stilted, halting effort to break the spell, "*you couldn't! Not that morning!* Why, John, that—that is the morning after our wedding. Why must this be! What did he say, John? What *did* he say?"

"I cannot tell you that, but it must be wiped out."

"And will blood wipe it out . . . his, or—or yours?"

Doggedly he answered: "It is a matter of honour."

"Oh, you men! What high-sounding words you use to mask your deeds. Do you place the right to avenge a personal insult above love, above happiness?"

"It was not a personal insult. It is not vengeance. It is a matter of defense."

"Of what, John?"

"Of my dearest possession."

"You mean—me? He said something about me?"

John Summers shifted his eyes to the ground, his lips pressed into a line. His silence told her all that she needed to know.

"What does it matter, John? He is a beast! But you cannot fight him. Think, John. If you—if he falls, you will be imprisoned. You know the law against

fighting with the King's men. And you are in high favour with the Governor. What will become of us?"

"We will go west—into the wilderness. I have made all arrangements, all plans."

"But John, that is the morning—Oh, you can't fight him then! That is the very first morning after our wedding."

He took her hands in his, meeting her eyes with a searching look. "Would you have the wedding postponed?" he asked quietly.

"Oh, no! Not that! I would rather be a—a—Oh, John!" She threw her arms about his neck and sobbing brokenly buried her face on his shoulder.

3

All who attended the wedding at Peter Ransome's house the following night remembered it until the last days of their lives. But it was not the brilliant color and gayety of the household, nor the beauty and quiet loveliness of the bride, that served to fix it in their minds. They had seen weddings before, and many lovely brides. It was what happened the morning following that made them look back upon the ceremony with eyes that now saw the high drama of the hour. How Prudence Ransome had carried it off! There was a woman for you! said the men. How sweet and wistful she was, and how foolish not to have put her foot down, said the women.

But men and women alike took equal pride in retelling the tale. Was she not a Ransome, and from their own

town? Of course, John Summers had risked a great deal, had made his bride shoulder a heavy burden, but by the gods! he had been wise enough to choose pistols and had killed that swine Roup at the very first shot! That was something.

Yes, there under the trees at dawning, John Summers had defended the honor of his bride. An hour later, with Prudence at his side, he was riding westward into the wilderness. Prudence was poorly equipped to meet the hardships that would fall to the wife of a woodsman, but she was bravely mailed against hardship and pain. She knew love.

King's men, and friends who rode to overtake the fleeing couple, came upon two burned out camp fires, miles apart, that marked the places where they had halted to rest. At the last camp site two slain Indians lay under the trees a little way from the camp fire—mute evidence that John Summers was still equal to the task of protection.

A little way beyond this point the trail faded. The wilderness had swallowed them.

Somewhere westward the axe of John Summers fashioned a home, and in time the laughter of children changed it from a rough-hewn cabin to a castle of delight. And back in Williamsburg never tiring tongues fashioned a monument.

BOOK TWO:
WILL SUMMERS OF TENNESSEE



Chapter One

THE WORLD AT THE FORKS

I

“**L**OOK here, Lon—and you, Abel. This is Texas.” Will Summers gave the map a final smoothing and stepped back from the table, watching with grave intentness the faces of his two friends.

“Is that her?” Abel Roundtree cocked his head sagely and walked slowly around the table as though he would thus circumnavigate the territory and in so doing gain a better idea of the whole. “Well, Will,” he said at last, “she ain’t so much. If that’s a good pitcher of her, I’m satisfied with Tennessee.”

Summers frowned. He had hoped that this map, somewhat crude in its execution but suggesting great distances, would serve as a torch to kindle the fire of adventure in the hearts of these two friends, or at least awaken an interest more lively than his word pictures had provoked.

“A map is not a picture,” he explained tolerantly. “Its purpose is to give you the location of towns, rivers and mountains and an idea of the size of the territory.”

“It don’t look big,” Abel said.

Realizing that he could never explain the intricacies of map-making to one who had never before seen a map, Summers put his hand on Abel’s shoulder and gave him a gentle push.

"You'll find it big enough—when we get there," he said.

"Now, Will," Abel protested weakly, sensing the determination in that last remark, "I want you to leave out the 'we.' When yore brother Jim lit out fer there several year ago he talked jes' like you're talkin' now. To hear him tell it I'd be richer'n Egypt in no time if I'd go along. Where'd you git that map?"

"Jim sent it."

"Jes' what I thought! He keeps everlastin'ly at a thing. He's as bullheaded as you are. I never knowed a Summers that didn't have his own way about things once he got the bit in his teeth. How's Mary? Did he say?"

"Yes. She's well. Their first boy, little Jim, is talking now."

"He would be—if he took after his Pap. First thing we know he'll be writin' letters tellin' us we'd ought to come to Texas. What's wrong with Tennessee, I'd like to know?"

Without making answer Summers turned his attention to Lon Bullard, who was bending over the map.

"Where is Jim located?" Bullard asked.

"Here," Summers put his finger on the map. "East and south of Nacogdoches, in the old Heyden Edwards colony. But we wouldn't go there. Jim admits in his letter that several of the colonists are having trouble with their land titles. Some of them have even lost their land. Edwards did some pretty shady things and the Mexican Government hasn't forgotten the Fredonia War."

"What did I tell you?" Abel broke in. "That's jist the way with them Mexicans. Who wants to spend a lot of muscle gittin' a-holt of a piece of land and then have a Mexican take it away from him? There ain't no law down there."

"Oh, yes there is!" Summers declared. "It's bad in the old Edwards colony, I'll admit, but we would go to Austin's colony. Here," he indicated on the map, "somewhere down near the mouth of the Brazos. We can get good land there, and Austin is honest."

Abel backed away from the table. "There goes that 'we' agin. I don't care how honest Austin is, *we* stay right here. Besides, from that pitcher I don't like her looks. She's too flat. Not a pitcher of a hill where a feller could grow a little terbaccer."

"I told you it wasn't a picture. It is a——"

"How much land could we get, Will?" Bullard asked, ignoring Abel's arguments.

"A single man, if he raises live stock, can get a fourth of a league. A league if he is married."

"How much is a league?" Abel asked.

"A little over four thousand, four hundred acres."

"Gawd-a-mighty! It must be plentiful."

"It is. The three of us could get ours adjoining and it would be all we could handle—all we could farm."

"I don't want any and I can't farm any," Abel protested. "You know I'm ailin' and porely, Will. In the huntin' and trappin' season I manage to keep goin', but in the farmin' season I wilt like a flower. You've got the old home place up on the crick, and you don't half farm that."

"Jim left because there wasn't a living in it for both of us—and I offered him my half," Summers replied.

"You don't try. You spend all yore time down here at Lon's, readin' them books." Abel waved his hand toward a row of some two dozen books constituting a library for which Lon Bullard was famous throughout the countryside. "Yes, sir," Abel went on, "ever since yore Pappy died you bin comin' down here to Lon's store to sit around with yore nose in them books till you're smart enough to beat Dave Crockett his se'f fer Congress. What's become of all that talk you bin makin' about goin' to Madison or someplace to study law? Lon's bin learnin' you all he knows, and that's a heap, and now you start pesterin' us about goin' to Texas to git some land. It don't take brains to plow. Besides, ain't there land enough right here in Tennessee?"

"Land enough, yes. But Texas is a land of promise. It is the greatest country left in America and Austin says he needs men—and families."

"Better look out then," Abel warned. "Whenever you hear of a man needin' help it's because he's in a sight of trouble. And if he's needin' families, we won't do. Ain't airy one of us got kith ner kin ner any prospects. I never knowed a man that paid less attention to wimmen than you do, and I never knowed two men that got less attention than Lon and me. When Lon first come here and built this store he looked like such a good ketch that a lot of the girls got busy settin' traps. But when he let out that lie about havin' a wife and ten children back in Virginia, they all started barkin' on some other trail. As fer me, I wouldn't have a

woman messin' around. They cause a sight of trouble—specially if a feller has ideas of his own. No, Will, we won't do. Seein' that Lon and me is both a right smart older'n you, you'd have a hard time passin' us off as yore family."

"I might acquire one," Summers answered with well feigned seriousness.

Abel moved around until he stood facing Summers. "Now, Will, you listen to me on that. You leave wimmen folks alone. There ain't airy woman in the world that could ever git along with you. You're too daggone bullheaded to give in to man or woman, and a married man can't have his way about much 'cept his dawgs."

Summers laughed at him. "All right, Abel, I'll take your advice there. But families are not all that is necessary to the development of a new country. Austin says he needs men—and rifles."

Abel made a clicking sound with his tongue. "Uh-huh! So that's the bresh pile where the rabbit's hid. I thought I smelt hemp a-burnin'."

Summers turned to Bullard, who had now moved away from the map and stood turning the pages of a book as though he were in search of something.

"What do you say, Lon? Can't you see the possibilities?" Summers asked.

"For me, yes. But you are not cut out to be a farmer, Will. You want to go only because you are young and it offers adventure. I know. The same lure brought me here from Virginia. Stick to your knitting, Will. You can do more with books than with a plow. You could make a name for yourself in the law."

"What chance have I?" Summers flared. "You have just one law book—the laws of the Legislature. I'd have to know more than that to be a lawyer."

"I suppose so, although there are some lawyers down at Madison who don't know much more. Listen to me, Will. I'm older than you, a good many years, and I've found out one thing: If you want a thing bad enough, you'll get it. The chance will come along, right when you least expect it."

Summers stepped to the table and snatched up the map. Folding it hastily he started for the door.

"Where are you going?" Lon called.

"Home," Summers flung back. "I would as soon try to show the Promised Land to a couple of pet possums."

2

Lon Bullard sat in the deep shade of the great oak and gazed sleepily at the low hills that rimmed the valley. Across the road stood his store, the only building at The Forks. Rough-hewn, drab, colorless, it brooded in the dust at the side of the road and, like all things else in the valley, slept in the sun. Bullard knew that its puncheon floors would not resound to the tread of trade until the morrow, when the political speaking and the shooting match would draw from the far ends of the county traders, shooters, idlers and men heatedly interested in politics. It would be a fevered day, when everyone would look to Bullard for all things; but to-day, until the committee arrived to arrange

the details of the shooting match, he could spend the time here under the oak in contemplation of his many blessings, not the least of these being that he had nothing to do but contemplate his blessings.

From the split hickory chair tilted at a restful angle against the oak he could overlook the entire valley; from the upper end where the road climbed over the low ridge, to that point below The Forks where it turned and dipped into a fringe of trees bordering a quarreling creek. In calm content Bullard closed his eyes with the thought that he was at peace with the world and that his world, The Forks, was at peace—regardless of whether Crockett met defeat or victory in the coming election.

He smiled a little over this latter thought. It amused him to see men become exercised and drawn into disputes and fights over Crockett's quarrel with President Jackson. It was a matter so very far away, of so little actual consequence in their lives. And it was both amusing and gratifying to Bullard that he had been able thus far to walk the middle of the road, listen to all arguments, bridle his own tongue and keep the trade of both factions.

In his youth, before leaving Virginia to ride westward on the heels of adventure, Bullard had acquired an education that, meager though it was, inspired a great respect among the people who came to his store to visit, gossip and trade. His living quarters in the back of the store boasted a row of a score of books. This alone marked him as a scholar. But he was no scholar. A scholar keeps close to his books; Bullard kept close to

his fellow men—knew them, understood them, loved them.

His store was the seat of knowledge and information. Here people came to trade for such simple articles as they had need of; needing nothing they came to sit under the shade of the great oak and talk with the garrulous, wise, story-telling, fun-making Bullard.

Then, too, they came here to settle all disputes arising out of tort, for Bullard was their magistrate, holding office from year to year under the highest authority possible—the consent of the people. In his row of books was a single sheep bound volume. The mere possession of such a book vested its owner with a supreme, irrefutable knowledge of law and justice. That his sense of justice was greater than his knowledge of law could be established by the fact that in trial he could find against a man and then, after adjournment, sell powder, lead and food staples to that same man.

It followed that all political speeches of the neighborhood would be made under the trees at The Forks, and to-day Bullard was composing his spirit against the vexations of the morrow and hoping that his friend, Will Summers, would arrive ahead of the other members of the committee. Summers was a firebrand, headstrong and impetuous, and an avowed Jackson man. He was as calm as a night in all things except his politics and Bullard was the only man in the neighborhood who could whisper words to him that cooled his ardor.

The sound of a horse coming down the well-worn trail behind the store caused Bullard to open his eyes and shift his position. Presently a horseman emerged

from the trees that swallowed up the trail. Reaching open ground, he came forward on the gallop.

Horse and rider were one in spirit, pride and grace, and all three of these things were unconscious attributes in both. The rider's long-barreled rifle, held across the pommel of the saddle, was at rest, yet somehow the observer felt that it was ready for instant action. It was alive, just as horse and rider breathed vigorous vitality.

"Howdy, Will." Bullard spoke without rising from his chair as Summers sprang lightly to the ground.

"Lon." Just one word of greeting, but it was enough. Summers never wasted words with Lon, knowing that words were not the cement of their friendship.

People knowing less of their fellows than did the people of this country would have wondered at the friendship between Lon Bullard and Will Summers. Bullard was a man past forty and greying a little at the temples; Summers was a youth of little more than half that age. Bullard was gregarious and easy of acquaintance; Summers was retiring, silent, thoughtful, but when aroused by a challenge to a game of words and wit, he was the equal of any man. It was in such encounters that his greatest fault showed through. Winning a field, he did not count it won until he had ridden back and forth across it, grinding into dust his beaten adversaries. Losing a field, he strode from it in heat—and sharpened his sword for another day.

Bullard and Summers had little enough in common. The youth had been drawn to the older man through a respect for a seeming vast store of knowledge; Bullard,

finding a ready listener, was glad to have the youth around. In time this association ripened into a full friendship and a deep understanding.

Something about Summers, either his quiet manner or his indolent, easy grace, lent him years which he did not possess. Just turned twenty-three, he was the physical idol of the younger men of the community and was admitted to the councils of the elders. He stood six feet two and was of good proportions, but there was nothing about his heft or height that would attract attention in a land peopled by tall, well-proportioned men. Yet, seeing him for the first time, men were wont to turn and follow him with their eyes, and the girls of his acquaintance, though long since given to despair, still cast covert glances from beneath their bonnets when he passed them by. A mass of unruly brown hair tumbled over a well-shaped head, and a certain set to his chin and jaws spoke of physical and moral strength. Deep brown eyes, shadowed by heavy brows, spoke for him, laughed for him, entreated, protested, approved and condemned.

Summers was the offspring of a long line of Cavaliers. His father and mother, though poor in purse, had been rich in mind and proud in spirit. They had trained their children in graces not commonly found in the backwoods. Their books were few; the Bible served them for something more than a religious guide and comforter. It modeled their speech. They were hardy pioneers, but they did not sink into the quaint idiom and slovenly speech so common among their neighbors. They had a pride in family background; a belief that manners

mark the man; a sure knowledge that they were equal in the social scale with any American freeman.

These things had left their stamp upon Will Summers. He, too, was a Cavalier, and as he stood now by the side of his powerful black stallion, stroking the arched neck, Bullard cocked his head to one side and smiled approval of both horse and man.

"Hard Cash is as fine a hoss as I ever saw, Will—even in Virginia." Bullard added the last as an extravagant compliment.

"He will have to be a good horse to stand what's before him," Summers answered.

"What do you mean?"

"We are going to Texas."

"Shucks, Will! I thought you had forgotten that tune in the last two days. But you never forget, do you? Well, I'm like Abel—Tennessee is good enough for me. I'm satisfied."

"No you are not, Lon. You left Virginia when you were about my age. You wanted to go west. This is the West no longer. Things have changed. I tell you, Lon, Austin has good land and is sending letters all over the country asking for good families."

"Two bachelors and two riding horses!" Bullard expostulated. "Do you call that a good family? Remember what Abel told you the other day."

"Men first," Summers argued doggedly. "It takes men to make a country. The women will come along—in time."

Bullard shook his head. "You're wrong there, Will. Men and women together. A lone man in a new country

rattles around like shot in a powder horn. He doesn't take root."

"You took root here," Will reminded him.

"Yes, I suppose so. But if I should die to-morrow you are the only person who would be upset about it. All I've given to the country is a little store where men can come and argue."

"You're wrong, Lon. You've done more than that. But if you feel that way, then it's high time to start moving. Texas is going to develop into a great country."

"The United States is good enough for me. I don't want to be ruled by Mexicans."

"It will be ruled by Americans—if enough of them go there. You know that Jackson tried to buy it."

"Yes, and failed."

"I know, but that is only the beginning. Some day it will become an empire in its own right."

"Careful, Will. That was Burr's dream."

"Yes, and if I can read signs, other men are now having the same dream. Jim writes me that Sam Houston has just turned up there on some mysterious mission. Houston and Jackson have been hand in glove ever since the Creek war. See anything significant in that?"

"Humph! What could Houston do? He has sunk to the lowest depths. He is living with the Cherokees somewhere in Arkansas Territory, I understand. He was smart enough, but he has run his race."*

*Houston, toward the close of his term as governor of Tennessee, married Eliza Allen. The honeymoon was scarcely over when the bride let Houston know that she had been forced into the marriage by ambitious parents and that her heart belonged to another. She then returned to her parents. Houston promptly sent in his resignation as

"You don't know Houston, Lon. Do you remember what he said after the House of Representatives tried him for whipping one of their members, Stanberry, on the streets?"

"No, I don't recall. Something oratorical though, I'll wager. He never misses a chance. He was shrewd enough to get Francis Scott Key to defend him. What did he say?"

"He said, 'I was dying out, and had they taken me before a common justice of the peace and fined me for assault and battery, it would have finished me. But they gave me a national tribunal for a theatre and it sets me up again.' You'll hear from him in Texas before he is done. It is a better land than this, Lon, and they need men like you and me. Not a soul in the world to leave behind. Free as the winds. And we are going."

This last was said with such earnest determination that Bullard decided it were wiser to be in agreement. He felt sure Crockett would bring up issues at the political speaking to-morrow that would fire the blood of every Jackson man to fever heat, and Summers was a Jackson man, dyed in the wool. In fact, he had just been defending Houston for no reason other than that Houston was Jackson's friend.

"All right, Will," Bullard sighed wearily, as though he had at last made decision. "If you say we are going, we are. I can't wear myself out arguing with a bull-

governor, giving no reason for his action, and made his way to Arkansas Territory where he joined the Cherokee tribe. His action, though hasty and ill-advised, was characteristic of the man. It was his idea of a gallant gesture. He was determined to spare the woman, even at the cost of a brilliant career.

head. It's easier to go to Texas. Of course, I'm disappointed. I thought you had your heart set on studying law. You've given that up, I reckon?"

"What opportunity have I here? You know I am poor and will have to take what is offered. That's Texas."

"All right, all right! But since we won't get started for a day or two we had better turn our attention to making arrangements for the speaking and the shooting match. I thought you were against Crockett?"

"I am."

"And you don't mean to stay long enough to vote against him?"

"I have just one vote."

"I've heard of men being beaten by one vote. This race is going to be a close one. It's a hoss race." Bullard looked at Summers shrewdly, but his statement had made no visible change in the set of the younger man's jaw.

"Yonder comes Abel and Old Man Williams," Summers pointed down the road.

Bullard nodded. "Yes, and Old Man Williams has been riding the county for the past week to turn folks out to hear Crockett. He's doing his level best to elect him. Now, Will, if he gets sore under the yoke this morning, just keep your shirt on. Besides, you're not overly interested in how this comes out, so let the old man have his say. Abel is betwixt and between. The only thing he gets excited about is his little tobacco crop. I'm keeping my vote for election day. Since you're not interested enough to stay to cast your vote——"

"But I am interested——" Summers saw the trap just

in time. He broke off and stood watching indifferently the approach of the two horsemen.

"Mawnin' boys!" Mr Williams called out exuberantly as he brought his ewe-necked mare to a halt. "I've good news fer you."

Caleb Williams rarely carried any news, good or bad, and he did not purpose to sacrifice dramatic effect by rushing headlong into his tale. His small, beady eyes twinkled ferret-like under shaggy eyebrows and his gnarled, work-battered fingers grasped his wiry beard, pulling it well back under his chin and holding it there as though to thus eliminate any possible interference with his view.

The minute of silence was long, but it was not as dramatic as Caleb had planned. Abel Roundtree displayed a total lack of stagecraft by slapping at a fly on his horse's neck and saying:

"Damn that botfly! Did you ever have a horse with bots, Will?"

Caleb Williams glared malevolence.

Out of sympathy came Bullard's question. "What's the news, Caleb?"

"Well, sir, that feller Fitzgerald, who's runnin' agin Crockett, aims to fetch himself up here to-morrow with a passel of lawyers frum Madison and speak agin Dave. I'll bet old Ring, the best coon dawg thet ever sounded on trail, agin any low down, ornery cur anybody wants to put up, that Davy'll make a mash of him. Fitzgerald 'ud git more votes by stayin' away, say I. But I reckon he's heard that hell's a-stewin' and he's comin' up to jump in. Davy ain't so long on big words but he's long on

ideas. I told him to be shore to fetch his rifle. When he gits through shootin' they won't be airy vote left fer pore Fitz."

"A remarkable qualification for Congress," Summers commented succinctly.

Williams bristled. Abel Roundtree shifted his position and took a fresh chew from a long, black twist. An argument was about to begin and he wanted to be in position to tally the hits with vehement and accurate expectorations.

"Does Crockett intend to speak, or just shoot?" Summers asked pointedly. "I had hoped to hear him speak. My impression is that Congress has greater need of statesmen than of rifle shots."

Abel spat.

"Now, Will," Bullard began in an effort to preserve peace, "maybe a fellow could be both a statesman and a rifle shot. But we have our own knitting to tend to. Let's leave it to Fitzgerald to hold him level in the speaking and you can hold him level in the shooting."

"That's right," Abel agreed, taking the role of a peacemaker. "We don't want that old b'ar hunter traipsin' off down to Washington blowin' about beatin' us shootin' here at The Forks. If you are so sot agin him, Will, you kin tuck his tail feathers in the shootin' match."

"I'll leave that to you, Abel. You are a good shot and——"

"Tolerable," Abel agreed, "but I'm ailin' here lately. My hand ain't as stiddy as it once was and my hind sight blurs. I'm porely like."

No man in the county could remember a time when Abel was feeling fit. He was a physical giant, and at work or at play could exhaust a dozen average men. But by his own word he was forever "ailin' and porely like." Witnessing his feats of prowess men wondered what he might do if he were really at himself. Even Caleb Williams abandoned his present war-like attitude and grinned at Abel's complaint.

"Well, boys, let's start burnin' bresh," he said. "I figger the speakin' will sorta take keer of itself. The wimmen will bring the victuals and that leaves us with nothin' to do but cut a stump fer the speakers and arrange the shootin' match. I've got a fat beef I'll furnish if the boys'll agree to pay as much as twenty-five cents a shot."

"How many shooters?" Abel asked.

"There'd oughter be twenty, maybe thirty. Some of the boys'll take four-five shots. That'll fetch in enough to pay me fer the feedin'."

"And then some," Abel commented. "Last time we had a match over on Buck Crick you furnished the beef and he brung twenty-five dollars. And that boy Clem of your'n put in two shots and got the hide and taller. You'd orghter go into the business."

"Clem's a good shot," Caleb admitted with a grin. "Maybe the best in these parts."

Abel spat indignantly. "Oh, I dunno! Will here shoots middlin' and I ain't so keerless with my lead when I ain't feelin' porely. You might fetch Clem along and have him shoot agin Crockett. If he beats him he might land up in Congress, you can't tell. But if he

comes I'll bet a dozen coon skins agin a dram of powder that Will beats him."

Summers flushed and Caleb Williams swallowed his anger. But Abel knew that he had planted the seed. Caleb would carry the challenge to Clem, and Summers would be drawn into the match against his will. This was all Abel desired. He idolized Summers and was forever devising ways to draw him out of his retirement and into the limelight. Having now accomplished this, Abel's spirits rose.

After the details of the shooting match had been arranged, Summers said:

"I think we should have some sort of platform for the speakers instead of just cutting a stump. It will seem a little more dignified. I don't mind saying I'm anxious for Fitzgerald to make a good showing."

"That's all he'll do—just show," Caleb Williams retorted.

"He's right about the platform," Bullard again stepped into the breach. "There's a couple of walnut logs right over there on the creek bank. We can drag them over here, notch 'em and lay on some of those puncheons I've got out behind the store. That'll lift the speakers above the crowd. Help me yoke the oxen, Abel, and we'll snake those logs over."

"Wait a minute." Abel walked over to the creek bank, a distance of fifty yards, and examined the logs. They were about twelve feet long and near a foot in diameter.

"We don't need the oxen fer these," he called back. "We can tote 'em over."

"Sure," Summers laughed in mockery. "You bring one, Abel, and I'll bring the other."

Without a word Abel accepted the taunting challenge. Stooping down at one end of the largest log he lifted it to his knee and then, getting a shoulder under the end, worked his crouching way forward until the end in the air was ready to swing down in perfect balance. With a final cautious movement he shifted the log on his shoulder until the end on the ground swung up into balance.

Walking slowly, legs wide apart, Abel brought the log to the place Lon indicated. He stood there for a moment, steadying the heavy timber. Then with a quick movement he lowered his shoulder and with a cat-like spring jumped clear as the log crashed heavily to the ground.

"There!" he said, dusting his hands. "Now, Will, fetch your'n."

Laughing, Summers slapped him on the back.

"You bring it, Abel. I'm not ailin' as much as you are."

3

By eleven o'clock the next day Bullard's store was crowded with men eager for argument. Across the road, under the trees in the clearing, the women folk were busily spreading dinner. Here, too, men were gathered in factional groups, discussing politics. Many children romped and played at games suited to their strength or stood in hungry expectation before the bar-

becue pit near the creek bank where a cotton-haired old negro worked magic with a glowing bed of hickory coals.

A little before noon Crockett came, riding a gaunt, big-boned bay. At once the entire crowd was buzzing with his name. The store emptied quickly. Every man who knew Crockett was eager to shake his hand, and the others, who carried in their minds stories of his wit and his skill with the rifle, were equally eager to catch sight of this backwoodsman who once before had gone to Congress and there dared oppose the will of a President who was the popular idol of a new democracy.

Taking advantage of the sudden exodus from the store, Bullard closed the door and crossed the road to join Summers and Abel under the great oak.

"That's Crockett," Bullard said.

Summers nodded indifferently. It was the first time he had ever seen the man and he was forced to a secret admission that his mental pictures, made up from hearsay, were at once both exaggerated and inadequate. He had visioned an uncouth giant. What he saw was a man of graceful carriage, whose every move was one of natural ease. He moved among the people as a commoner, but he stood out from them. He greeted them with friendly smile and homespun stories, treating them as familiars but holding a certain dignity which precluded familiarity.

Summers estimated his height at somewhere near six feet. His weight was somewhat less than his frame would justify—perhaps not more than a hundred and sixty. A little too lean, mayhap, but hard and bronzed.

"I'll be shot if he don't look somethin' like you, Will," Abel said. "At least so fur as the clothes are concerned. You'll have to change yore clothes or yore vote."

Frowning, Summers looked down at his own fringed buckskin shirt and breeches. They were almost identical with those worn by Crockett. Even his cap, a coonskin, was the same shade as Crockett's and his leather knife sheath, worn under the left arm, was fashioned exactly as the famous woodsman's.

"It does seem you two were trying to start a fashion," Bullard said. "He's coming over now to speak to me. Want to meet him?"

Summers nodded.

"Be keerful, or he'll win yore vote," Abel warned.

"When he lines up with Jackson," Summers countered, "and not before."

Crockett worked his way through the crowd until at last he was able to reach Bullard's hand.

"Howdy, Lon," he called out boisterously. "By dogs! if you had Crockett here to speak ever' day you'd soon enough have a trade as big as some of the stores down at Washington."

Summers recoiled. Certainly the man had an exalted ego.

"I don't want so much trade," Bullard told him. "It would keep me too poor. What I need is less trade and more profit. Colonel, this is my friend, Will Summers. Of course you know Abel. Summers is a Jackson man, Colonel, but he won't be here to vote. He is going to Texas."

Crockett opened wide his eyes as he shook hands.

"To Texas, eh? Well, sir, if I didn't owe it to my country to get elected and go down to Washington and put back them dee-posit, I'd side in with you, Mr Summers, and go along. Texas would mighty soon belong to us if Jackson would send down some soldiers to protect the rights of our citizens there."

"You can't blame everything on Jackson," Summers replied with some heat. "Texas belongs to Mexico, you know—or do you?"

Crockett grinned. "Seems like I've heard of it. But if Mexico keeps inviting Americans down there and then violates her promises, first thing you know those colonists will start lead a-flyin'—if Crockett knows anything about an American. Yes, sir, they'll do it just as sure as I was born to put back them dee-posit. Are you going to Austin's colony?"

"Yes."

"Did you know he was beginning to have some trouble with his grant?"

"No."

"Well, he is. I hear that a good many of the colonists are turning back. I tell you if our government did the right thing we'd send some soldiers down there to settle that land grant business. A few men like Crockett could soon put an end to that shady business. If I wasn't busier gettin' elected than a dog fightin' fleas, I'd go myself. When are you leavin', Mr Summers?"

"After your defeat, Mr Crockett. I have decided to wait for that."

Crockett laughed easily. "That reminds me of the story of the stranger who asked the boy how far it

was to the Obion River and the boy said, 'If you turn around and head in t'other direction you ain't got fur to go, but headed like you are it's almighty fur.'

The listening group pressing around laughed uproariously at this sally. "Good shootin', Colonel!" one of them applauded. "Squar on the nail."

Unabashed, Summers replied: "I shall go to Texas soon after your defeat, Mr Crockett. That places it sometime in the Fall."

"All right," Crockett maintained good humor, "and if you're right, dogged if I won't go along. I've no quarrel with a man for following his conscience. The voters here gave me a vacation from Congress for two years because I done that very thing and refused to wear Jackson's collar.* But they are beginnin' to see they was put upon. Be sure you're right and then go ahead, say I. Some folks even call me 'Old Go Ahead Crockett.' But come, now. I hear the wimmen folks callin' out dinner and a man shouldn't let politics stand

*Crockett had served two terms in Congress and had been defeated for re-election because of his opposition to President Jackson. His chief quarrel with Jackson was over the Bank question. Jackson had put into effect some startling changes in national economics, including the withdrawal of all Federal funds from the Bank of the United States. Jackson thought the Bank too powerful and even feared it might challenge the strength of the Union. With characteristic energy, he set about its destruction. Crockett was, in all probability, as wretched an economist as was Jackson, and certainly he was less powerful. This irked him, and he took the other side of the argument largely for the reason that it furnished him with good company, for Jackson had made many enemies. There was a great clamouring at Jackson's heels, and Crockett was only one of the many yelping in the pack. It was another case of old dog Tray. Crockett was honest and firm in his convictions, but it was not uncommon for him to fall in line with politicians who were trying to pull some chestnuts out of the fire and were quite willing to let any number of small boys help them with the task. Crockett did not know how to quit once he had undertaken a job.

twixt him and victuals. I reckon the food was brought for both sides. I'll eat with you, take a horn with you, and then we'll vote as we please. And that, as the Dutchman says, 'is as fair a ding as ebber was'."

4

The women, flushed of face from their labors in preparing the meal, waited upon the men and buzzed like bees in their eagerness to see that everyone was offered some portion from their largess. Crockett was the starting point of all dainties. He was shrewd enough to know that votes hung upon his capacity and the volume of his praise.

"Well, Colonel," Caleb Williams mumbled through a full mouth, "seems like Fitzgerald warn't aimin' to show up."

"If he misses this dinner he'll miss all he could get by comin' here," Crockett replied in a voice strong enough to be heard by all. "And if he comes now he'll get about what he will at the election—just my leavin's. A man that comes late to a basket dinner is just about as welcome as a sinner who comes into church with a new pair of boots right at the time the parson's prayin'. The easier he tries to walk the louder they squeak. The more a latecomer tries to apologize the deeper he gits his foot in it. But I'll be mighty disappointed if Fitz don't show up. I aim to ask him some questions myself—'specially about some of the things he says I said. Either his memory is mighty long or mine is tarnation short."

"You'll git yore chanct, Colonel," spoke up a Fitzgerald supporter. "Yander he comes now, ridin' like a gentleman and thinkin' more about what he's goin' to say than what he's goin' to eat. Like as not he figgers to go to Congress on his brains 'stead of his belly."

Crockett, ready with a biting reply, saw that the effect of the shot had been lost in the interest created by his opponent's arrival. All eyes were upon the road where, at a brisk and jaunty gait, two splendid dappled greys were bringing up a shining coach. The negro driver, conscious of the eyes of the crowd, was sitting proudly erect, his whip at the perfect angle. His was a position of pride—he drove The Great Gentleman.

In the rear seat rode Fitzgerald and a lawyer named Crenshaw from Madison County. Dignity rested as heavily upon them as upon the negro driver. They rode like princes in procession. Who could tell, watching them now, that they were fatigued by their journey and at a halt down the road had meticulously brushed the dust from their tall beaver hats and rich broadcloth coats?

Fitzgerald wore snuff colored trousers, a new broadcloth coat and a flowered waistcoat of intricate design. His chin was arrogantly tilted by a high stock. Seemingly unmindful of the crowd, he sat at studied ease, his fingers toying with a huge gold chain that hung festooned across his waistcoat.

As the negro driver brought the horses to a stop sudden enough to make them prance, the Fitzgerald supporters in the crowd began a noisy shouting and handclapping. In feigned surprise Fitzgerald arose from his seat, swept

the beaver hat from his head in a graceful arc, bowed like a courtier and said: "My countrymen."

An hour's speech could have had no more telling effect upon those who were eager to applaud. Again shouting and handclapping greeted him as he alighted gracefully, one thumb hooked in the pocket of his waistcoat, the other hand holding his hat over his heart. He knew how to impress a constituency.

"Hurrah fer Fitz!" some clownish wag called out. "He's smart enough to come dressed fer his own funeral."

Fitzgerald, now busily shaking hands with those admirers who pressed around, ignored the taunt.

The lines of division were clearly drawn. The administration men were milling around the newcomer. Awed by the aristocracy of his attire, they began furtively wiping their hands on their breeches in preparation for whatever honor could be squeezed from a handshake with one so obviously gentle. But the Crockett faction, overwhelmingly superior in numbers, viewed the disturbance with frowning disapproval. Modish dress and courtly grace meant nothing to them, unless, indeed, these things served to quicken the inborn fears of a simple yeomanry who by force of arms and the power of votes had escaped the yoke of aristocracy.

A meeting between the two opponents was now inevitable and the tension heightened as the two factions sensed this. Fitzgerald moved forward toward the Crockett group, who had stayed by their food with simple devotion. Seeing Crockett, he halted and bowed.

"Mr Crockett, I believe?" he said.

"You can be sartin of it," Crockett replied. "I've heard so many things about Crockett, comin' from you, that I'm surprised you have any trouble recognizing me."

"Mr Crockett," Fitzgerald replied evenly, "what you say of me loses nothing by the time it reaches my ears, I can assure you, and doubtless my hearers enlarge upon my remarks. As you know, sir, those who serve the people must bear the burden of their tales."

"Then there'd ought to be some mighty short tales just now," Crockett retorted, "for the people are gettin' precious little service. But I'll shut my pan on that now and keep the powder dry. I reckon you've come prepared to tell all these people why Old Hickory had ought to be made king, and I'm here to tell 'em why the dee-positis must be put back. And while I'm at it I'll mention a few other things that'll make it almighty hard for an honest man to vote agin me. But let that go now. You'd better fall to on these victuals. So far as I see the wimmen ain't drawed any party lines on the food."

Fitzgerald faced the women with a disarming smile. "I apologize to these ladies for my late arrival. The journey was longer than I thought. But I can see now that the food alone is well worth a much longer trip."

"Then he'd better eat hearty," someone said, *sotto voce*. "Hit's about all he'll git."

5

The dinner over, the men again collected in factional groups. Many of them retired to the bank of the creek,

where the shooting match was to be held and where a large jug gave every visitor a greater strength in his political convictions. In the back of Lon's store another jug was doing duty. Oratory would have little weight now. The distillate of hillside corn had worked its full measure of loyalty and prejudice.

Fitzgerald spoke first. His words were well chosen—too well for many of his hearers. The address was polished, but it had the polish of a bone. There was no meat to it. He straddled issues and sought to erect a platform broad enough to provide standing room for every man. The speech had one virtue: It left him in the same position occupied in the beginning. He had lost no supporters and had gained none of the Crockett votes.

"What do you think now?" Bullard asked Summers at the end of the flowery but dull speech.

"Wait. I have heard but one man."

When Crockett took the stand, old Rance Tolliver, who had fought with Crockett and Jackson in the Creek war and had been with Jackson at New Orleans, took up a position against a tree near the edge of the platform. He was a stout Jackson man and from his demeanor and appearance it was evident that he was preparing to heckle the speaker. He leaned languidly against the tree, half facing the crowd. As Crockett opened, Rance began chewing in a ruminating way and cutting fine shavings from a pine stick.

Crockett, a many-sided man, was shrewd enough to speak in the idiom and language of his audience. He launched into an attack on the despotism of the Jackson

administration. When he had clinched his point the crowd applauded. But Rance Tolliver merely cut off an unusually large shaving, grasped his full beard as he ducked to spit and then roared with a full voice:

"Maybe that's a p'int, but who licked the British at New Orleans?"

Undaunted, Crockett next attacked Jackson's seizure of the treasury and the withdrawal of deposits from the Bank. With the sure sense of a showman he tossed into the crowd several small copper tokens, not unlike a coin, which bore on one side a likeness of Jackson in full military regalia arising from a looted treasure chest. Around the figure of Jackson ran the words, "I Take the Responsibility." On the reverse side was the likeness of a mule, and here another legend: "The Constitution As I Understand It."

The sight of these tokens brought shouted approval. Again Rance Tolliver sliced off a large shaving, again spat vehemently and roared:

"Maybe it's a p'int, but who licked the British at New Orleans?"

Crockett now had enough of such play. Many times he had heard Rance boast of the outstanding role he had played in that battle, and he knew a way to silence him if not actually win him over. With a twinkle in his eyes he turned and began speaking almost directly to Tolliver.

"Down at Washington," he said, "Jackson has filled up the government jobs with men who call him *The Hero*. Nobody else is ever mentioned. You'd think, to see him grease and swallow all the praise, that he et up

the British at New Orleans all by himself—lock, stock and barrel. You all know how he's kept Major Lewis down at Washington to keep beatin' the drums fer Old Hickory. I asked Lewis once who licked the British at New Orleans and he said, 'Old Hickory, of course.' I asked if he didn't have any soldiers and officers along with him and Lewis looked kinda funny and beat. I asked him if he could name any of the soldiers and officers from my districk who had been in the fight and he said he couldn't remember their names. I told him I could, and that I knowed quite a passel of them and that I was sick and tired of all this hero worship. I told him it was about time some of the underbrush was bein' mentioned. I told him right to his teeth that I had always thought it was the brave rifles from Tennessee that won that fight."

Rance came to life. He threw down the pine stick, cast his cud from him and yelled at the top of his voice:

"By God, that's a p'int! Hurrah fer Dave Crockett! That's a p'int and Rance Tolliver'll ride the roads a-makin' it clear. Hurrah fer Crockett!"

Others joined him in the shouting. When the applause and laughter subsided Crockett again took up his speech, but it was short. He was wise enough to know that his own forces could not be divorced and that by a simple story he had won over many men of the same kidney as Rance Tolliver.

"What do you think now?" Bullard asked Summers when Crockett had made an end.

"I am still an administration man."

"You like Fitzgerald?"

"I said I was still an administration man."

Bullard shook his head. "Well, Will, sometimes I think all my efforts have been for nothing. You've read all my books and all the books you could borrow, but you're still just as bullheaded as you were back there when you were learning to cipher in the first three rules. An education doesn't do a fellow any good unless he uses it."

Caleb Williams came up in company with Crockett and Roundtree.

"Now, Will," Caleb sang out in a voice made boisterous by several trips to the jug, "I reckon you'll admit that the Colonel made a mash outen the gover'mint."

"The government still lives," Summers replied.

"You're right," Crockett answered, "but it still lives only because it's so tarnation healthy. If you could go down to Washington and see some of the things I've seen you'd quick enough admit it was growin' feeble. But I've had my say for one day. Let's go over to the creek and get our chances from the judges. They'll start shootin' soon."

"I'm not shooting," Summers said.

"You're not?" Crockett seemed surprised. "I heard you were an almighty fine shot. What's the reason?"

"He's got two reasons," Caleb Williams answered, insensible to danger. "One's you, Colonel, and t'other's my boy Clem."

Crockett saw it was time to take a hand. "Come, come, Caleb! You've missed the point."

"He has," Summers said, a biting quality in his voice. "But I won't miss mine. I'll take five chances."

"That's a dollar and twenty-five cents," Bullard cautioned.

"A very cheap price for an entire beef," Summers answered as he turned away. "And it should wipe out both of the reasons given by Mr Williams."

The shooters gathered in the clearing near the creek. The audience was made up of women, children, and those men who knew that in such company it would be profligacy for them to hazard twenty-five cents on a single shot.

The distance was forty yards. Before the match began one of the judges passed around with a sheet of paper, asking each contestant to write down his name and the number of shots he would take. Many of the men, more skilled with the rifle than the pen, handed over their money with the request:

"**You** do the writin', Jedge, and I'll do the shootin'. Writin' sorta makes my hand onsteady."

It was an ancient fiction but it invariably won a tolerant laugh.

Each shooter was then given a small board as a target and in the middle of this he made a rough cross. The rules governing the match were briefly outlined by one of the judges. His droning voice found few listeners. It was an old game, known to all. That shooter placing a shot in the center of his cross, or nearer the center than any others, would be awarded the hide and tallow. The second nearest would have his choice of the hind quarters; the third best man would receive the other hind quarter; the fourth and fifth took the fore quarters. The sixth man, to compensate him for his pains and expense,

might have the lead in the tree against which all had fired.

Summers, angered by Caleb Williams' taunt, had made the first subscription and was called first. He stood on the line, leaning lightly on his long-barreled rifle as he waited for the judges to place his target. Banter and jest ran along the line of watchers but Summers appeared wholly unconscious of the crowd. Crow's feet at the corners of his eyes and a tightness of the lips betrayed his concentration and determination.

Caleb Williams, knowing something of psychology, though not by that name, taunted:

"My boy Clem took five chances too, Will, and so has the Colonel. You can't afford to waste any."

"Ready?" one of the judges called as he stepped back from placing the target. "Fire."

Will's rifle came to his shoulder with one swift motion. Its dull roar, coming almost before his cheek had rested upon the stock, startled the onlookers into believing he fired by accident. The judges looked at each other quickly, undecided how to rule in such case. Summers lowered his rifle and turning to Caleb, said:

"Thank's for your advice, Mr Williams. That's the hide and tallow."

The judges, now reassured that the shot was intentional, stepped over to examine the board. There was a round hole at the intersection of the two lines.

"Boys, he plugged the center without aimin'," one judge announced as he took down the target and put up another. "The best any of you can do for first choice is to tie. Abel Roundtree! You're next."

Abel stepped to the line, took careful aim, and fired. His ball was a quarter inch from the center.

"I wasn't aimin' to beat Will," he said when the hit was announced. "I'm jes' here to hold you fellers level fer the second pick. I coulda done better if I hadn't been feelin' so porely." He walked over to where young Clem Williams was leaning unsteadily on his rifle. "Will's a natcheral born shot," he confided. "He don't even hafter aim."

Clem growled, but Abel continued, blithely: "Yes, sir, natcheral born. This distance is like fallin' off a log to him. Why, sometimes when he's practicin' I hold a lighted dip in my teeth and he snips her out jes' like that!" Abel snapped his fingers. "Yes, sir, jes' like that. Clean as anything and never touches the dip."

There was not a word of truth in the statement but Abel told it with impressive earnestness. Summers overheard the story and, rather than make a liar of his friend, discreetly held his tongue. He knew that credulity and a fool need no divorce.

"Clem Williams!" A judge called.

Clem's visits to the jug had been as frequent as his father's but his capacity was not as great. His aim was unsteady and his ball was wide the mark. He growled his anger and disgust.

"Oh, that wouldn't be so bad if there wasn't some better," Abel consoled.

When Crockett's turn came a deep hush fell over the crowd. Stories of his skill with the rifle had been told before every hearthstone in the district. His fame as a hunter had preceded him to Washington on his first

term in Congress. Papers throughout the country had announced his election with stories and articles that took no account of his qualifications as a legislator but heralded him as "the bear hunter from the canebrakes" and magnified his marksmanship with tales beyond belief.

"Ready, Colonel?"

Crockett's aim was long and deliberate. The shot was a little off center. This was a bitter disappointment to the Crockett faction. They had confidently expected him to tie Summers and win in the shoot off.

"Summers fer Congress!" shouted a gleeful Fitzgerald adherent. "Dogged if he don't shoot better."

The time came for Summers to fire his second shot. Again his rifle came up with a leap, the report following instantly. His method of shooting violated every precept of the art. When the judges announced that he had again centered his shot, the crowd, always ready for quip and jest, was impressed into silence. Summers turned to the frowning Caleb.

"Mr Williams, that is the right hind quarter," he said.

One of the other contestants, shaking his head in bewilderment, said to Abel Roundtree: "I knowed the first one was a accident, but I never saw two sich accidents happen in a row. How does he shoot so quick?"

Abel was glad to give him the information, in a voice that could be heard by Clem Williams.

"Well, sir, I'll tell you how he does it. He's got an arm stronger'n a b'ar's, his nerve's steadier than the grace o' God, his eye's quicker'n forked lightnin', and he's mad plumb through. Old Caleb sot a fire under him. You boys had as well save yore powder and lead.

Will says he's goin' to Texas and it looks like he was aimin' to git his first beef right here. Watch what I tell you. He'll win the whole beef—hoof, hide, and horns."

Abel's prophecy came true. When the match was over Summers had placed four shots on the center and the fifth was nearer than any others. Crockett was the first to congratulate him.

"That beats any shootin' I ever saw," he said, his voice earnest and his manner free from jealousy. "They call Crockett a great hunter. I've put in some tolerable good shots in my time, but I know when I'm licked. Next time I'm matched up agin you I'll see to it that I ain't runnin' for Congress. Then maybe you won't be so all-fired mad."

"I have no quarrel with you, Colonel," Summers said, looking him frankly in the eyes. "I had not intended to shoot, but when I was accused of being afraid to try, I had to do my best. I am not afraid to shoot against you nor vote against you."

Crockett put his hand on the younger man's shoulder. "All right, Summers. I'll be blessed if I hadn't rather have an honest vote agin me than a dishonest one for me. You've a right to vote as you please."

"And to oppose you in every fair way," Summers added.

"That's a hard sayin'. They tell me you have a sight of influence for a young man. But I've often said, 'Be sure you're right and then go ahead.' A sayin' that's good to say is good to listen to, so go ahead, say I—if *you're sure you are right.*"



Chapter Two

A MEETING BETWEEN GENTLEMEN

I

AT FIRST Summers looked upon Crockett's race as a joke. True, the man had served two terms in Congress, but he had opposed many of the Jackson measures and when he came up for re-election it was to discover that Jackson, and not Crockett, was the idol of the common people. Now, after a lapse of two years, he was again seeking office with no change in his policies. He was really seeking vindication of his stand against "Old Hickory," that dynamic, explosive figure who was Tennessee's proud answer to a nation drifting from Democracy to Aristocracy. They worshipped him, toasted him, and retired from office those who worked against him. Had he not, as Major-General of the militia, whipped the Indians into abject submission and by the vigorous establishment of law and order converted a blood-soaked wilderness into a peaceful frontier ready for the axe and the plow? Had he not beaten the British at New Orleans, with a handful of troops of his own kidney, and at a time when no other American general could be found with the courage or military ability successfully to face the trained legions of the King? Was he not a fire-eater, as ready to avenge a personal wrong or insult as he was to head an army? And had he not, when elected to the Presidency, slapped the aristocracy of the

East squarely in the face and set up a government of and for the people? By the Eternal! There was a man for you! Backwoodsman or no; a jungle beast dealing out spoils or an executive with a new vision; wise or foolish economist; right or wrong; he was still "Old Hickory," and a Tennessean.

This was the temper of the voters of Crockett's district, as Summers saw it, but by mid-July it was apparent to all that Crockett was becoming more firmly intrenched and gaining in popularity. At times uncouth, always direct, lacking in the niceties of manner that cloaked his political rival, yet there was something about the man that went straight to the hearts of the people. Strong Jackson men were actually supporting Crockett.

Many of them felt a natural resentment against the weapons employed by Fitzgerald. He hurled ridicule and scorn against Crockett, spoke of him as a 'bear hunter' and at times even laughed at his dress. This was gross error in a district where dress was little considered, where education was meager and where every man of an age to carry a rifle was a bear hunter—or wanted to be. Prowess in woodcraft was certain to harvest more votes than a long oration dealing with the problems facing the nation.

The community was too far removed from national problems to sense any great fear or to doubt their ultimate satisfactory solution. Then too, the people reasoned that one who could cope with a bear, single-handed, was well fitted as regards courage to cope with national issues. Jackson was President, and perhaps it was high time for some more plain, honest men to be placed in the seats

of the mighty—even if such men did not entirely agree with the administration.

Certainly Crockett was plain, honest and straightforward, making his way without fear and without affectation. These were the characteristics of the people around him. He was one of them, belonged to them, spoke their language, and his strength increased as the race went on.

At last Summers ceased to view the race lightly. It became a serious business with him. He began to create opportunity to voice his opposition. Definitely he put from his mind all thought of Texas until after the election.

Often, when riding to Bullard's store in the evening, he would halt Hard Cash atop the height of land back of the store and watch the sun splash a roadway of gold to the land of his dreams. Since childhood the hour of sunset had been his hour of agony and delight. The sun marched into a land of color and of gold. It beckoned him.

Always there had been restraint. He remembered when, little more than an infant, his father and mother had left the high hills of eastern Tennessee to push westward along the sun's road. Evening after evening, as the scenes changed, he and Jim, the elder brother, chafed under the restraint of the night's halt. They wanted to run after the setting sun, overtake it, and live always where there was so much of beauty and of color.

Jim, the first to reach manhood's estate, had gone on, following the sun to a new land of promise. But for Will there had been restraint. At the very hour when

he felt that he was old enough to ride down the sun's road, his father had sickened and died. A son must bear a father's burden, no matter where roads lead and call, and for three years he had borne that burden cheerfully and without complaint, though being careful never to permit himself to be found at sundown on a hill looking westward.

Fate, it seemed, had closed the western road to him. Accepting the condition because there was no other way, he had told Bullard that he would like to become a lawyer. But law books had not yet found their way into the community and there were few people in need of a lawyer. There were other ways to settle disputes—were they grave enough.

Bullard's books, and the half dozen books in his own home, had provided entertainment and given him a knowledge above that of his neighbors. They also fed the flame of his desire to get out of his present surroundings. For three years he tilled the fields by day, and by night lived in the fairylands made possible by books.

At last the mother, hard-bitten by hardship and toil, and with a heart no longer willing to go on, followed her husband to the little plot at Olive churchyard. Now there was no longer any restraint. At last he could follow the sun.

A letter to Jim, in Texas, carried word of the mother's death and asked for information as to the better route to follow and the better colony to choose.

Mails were slow, and while waiting for reply there would be ample time to influence Bullard and Abel to cast their lot with him in a new country. His arguments

in this direction had borne little fruit. Bullard and Abel were satisfied.

Even the map which Jim sent had failed to fire them with enthusiasm. To Summers that map was a torch rekindling all his old desires. He would have gone at once, but it was not easy to turn his back on Lon Bullard and Abel Roundtree. There was no gold in the western sky, or in all the world, more durable than the gold of their friendship and he could not find it in his heart to go without them. He must find a way to blast them out of their lethargic satisfaction, and to this he had set his hand and heart.

Then, in a moment of bullheaded antagonism, he had lifted another barrier of restraint. What mattered it, since he was setting his face westward, whether or not Crockett won the race? But Crockett's taunt, anent the departure for Texas being long delayed should he wait for Crockett's defeat, had served as a challenge which Summers felt forced to accept. Restraint again—made by his own hands.

Bullheaded, Bullard had called him. Abel had said he was like all others of the Summers family. Even so, he would see it through. Early Fall would find him on his way to Texas—and Lon and Abel would be with him. He could laugh then (to himself) over the fact that a bullheaded man often wins in the end.

So it was that Summers became an open crusader against Crockett. Daily he saddled Hard Cash and rode

the neighborhood. As time went on and the battle waged warmer he ceased to turn home at night, accepting the hospitality of those whom he visited, arguing late into the night and moving on the next morning, a tireless worker in Fitzgerald's cause.

He spent many hours with Bullard, pointing out Crockett's faults and contending that he was unfitted, in an educational way, to serve as Congressman. Bullard met the arguments with indifference or funny story and held to his own convictions. Had their friendship been less staunchly ribbed it would have been wrecked upon this rock, but in their earnestness neither man ever became blinded to the honest convictions of the other. Waging political warfare, they held fast to their friendship.

Despairing at last of converting Bullard, Summers spent more time with those whose minds were not closed. Wherever people gathered for trading, or to hear speeches, or for play, there Summers went and there he campaigned. He talked more than he had ever talked in his life, yet he wasted no words.

Because he was direct, frank, and fair, men heard him through even though they differed with him. But despite his fairness and his earnestness, he was a different type from those who made up the crowd. He dressed as they dressed, and they knew him to be a product of the wilderness, but there was a finish to his speech and an easy familiarity with words which left his hearers thinking that Crockett was overmatched. It was a case where the under dog needed help.

Summers was too shrewd and too gentle to employ

ridicule. It was a question to be decided on merit and he made attack along that line.

One day in late July he rode into a little settlement where he found a crowd of people gathered to hear Crockett. They had been told, they said, that Crockett would be here to defend and explain his opposition to Jackson.

"And is Fitzgerald to be here?" Summers asked one of the men.

"He's here now, down at Higginses store—him and a lawyer named Crenshaw from Madison County."

Summers went directly to the store. In the rear of the store Fitzgerald and Crenshaw were doing a bit of campaigning with a friendly jug. Summers stood a little aloof for the moment, watching the proceedings. At last someone in the group recognized him.

"Say, Fitz! There's your young fire-eater from The Forks."

Fitzgerald wheeled, then came forward with extended hand.

"Glad to see you here, Will. Won't you join us in a little toast?"

"No, thanks."

"What? You're not one of these newfangled temperance men, are you?"

"No—temperate. To keep from being called a teetotaler, I take two drinks a year—both of them together. On New Year's day I drink a toast to the old year and then take another one right on top of it to give me courage to face the new. I have just heard that Colonel Crockett is to speak here today. Is that true?"

"So they tell me. Here, Will, I want you to meet my friend—my campaign manager, you might call him. Oh, Crenshaw! Come here."

Crenshaw left the group in the back of the store and came forward. He was as elegantly dressed as Fitzgerald and was far more pompous. When he shook hands, Summers knew for a certainty that he disliked the man.

"I have heard a great deal about the fine work you have been doing, Mr Summers," Crenshaw said. Then he hooked his thumbs into the lower pockets of a fancy waistcoat and his fingers beat a soft tattoo on his Napoleonic stomach as he teetered back and forth from heel to toe. In speaking he had made it appear that he was bestowing high favor and confidence. "Indeed we have heard of your fine work," he repeated, "and we will not forget it. Eh, Fitz?"

Summers ignored the compliment and turned to Fitzgerald. "I saw Mr Crockett yesterday," he said, "and I do not believe he knows he is expected to speak here to-day. In fact, I heard him say he was going to speak to-day at Tomlinson's mill."

Fitzgerald winked knowingly and led Summers a little further forward in the store.

"Of course he doesn't know," he confided. "We let the word go out that he is to appear at a certain place to explain his fight against the administration. When he fails to show up, the voters conclude he has shown the white feather. But we are always there with our side of the argument. It is a close fight, Will, and it is now too near election time for him to repair the damage."

Summers started to speak, then closed his lips to a thin, hard line. "Mr Fitzgerald," he spoke at last, choosing his words with care, "there will be but one man speak here to-day, *and I will be that man*. Between ignorance and dishonesty there can be but one choice. In my small way I have worked for you until this hour, but I see that I have thrown my crumbs to a dog."

Fitzgerald drew himself stiffly erect, but before he could speak Crenshaw bustled forward and placed himself directly in front of Summers, trembling with the sputtering rage of a small man.

"Mind your words, sir!" he blustered. "Mind what you say!"

"I do mind, and I wish to amend. Since you are allied with him, I see that I have thrown my crumbs to a *pack* of hounds. I shall speak to the people here to-day and expose both of you."

"Why, you—you ignorant backwoodsman! Who would believe you? I'll—I'll——"

"You will keep your mouth closed before more poison comes from it," Summers said, and with an open hand he struck the man full across the mouth.

Crenshaw staggered back. A trickle of blood followed the blow. Surprised by the swift action, the small group of men in the rear of the store came pressing forward.

Flushed with anger and wounded dignity, and holding a white handkerchief to his cut lip, Crenshaw lifted his chin in trembling hauteur and said:

"Between gentlemen, if indeed you are a gentleman, such matters are adjusted in but one way. Mr Fitzgerald will be only too happy to call upon some friend of yours

to arrange a proper settlement of this insolent insult."

"No, no! Not I!" Fitzgerald spoke up quickly. "Think, man! I have too much at stake. It would never do."

Summers laughed aloud. "Ah! And I see that in the pack each dog must lick his own wounds. Mr Crenshaw, when you have found someone whose friendship is warm enough to cause him to serve you even at some cost to himself, you may tell him to wait upon my friend, Lon Bullard. I may add that I hesitate to subject a friend of mine to the temporary society of one who calls you friend. Gentlemen," he turned to the group of men who were now whispering among themselves, "you may be able to draw from these two scoundrels the reason for this little affray. But in case they are reluctant to speak, you will hear it from me, *publicly*, at the hour set for the speaking."

Turning, he walked from the store.

3

Half an hour later Fitzgerald and Crenshaw drove hurriedly away from Higgins' store; Fitzgerald feigning a sudden illness too severe to permit him to speak.

The people were now buzzing with excitement over the various stories of the blow that had been struck in the store. Like all tales twice told, they grew with each re-telling. Gossiping groups eyed Summers as he passed among them. If he stopped to talk, appearing wholly unconcerned and unmindful of their curiosity, they threw out broad hints calculated to draw out some explanation.

He was known as a Fitzgerald man and the people were at a loss to understand this sudden quarrel. To one over-inquisitive group Summers said:

"Truth rides a lame horse. I will not set it to overtake a lie that has a hundred messengers. I will speak to you all at two o'clock."

"Will Fitzgerald be back?" one man asked.

"I think not. I hear he was taken sick. If I don't miss my guess he is a mighty sick man."

"What's the matter of him?"

"I am no physician, but I think he is sick at the belly."

"You've hit it, Will! And yonder comes the reason he's so sick."

Summers turned to follow the pointing finger. Crockett came striding swiftly toward them. His gait had the swing of a woodsman following a warm trail and there was something in his manner which spoke of a suppressed rage. He came directly up to Summers. His eyes were steady, all the light of humor gone from them.

"Well, Will," he said, "you can't catch a fox if you start blowin' too loud on your horn. This same trick was worked on me in the last election and it give me two years at home to figger out a way to keep it from workin' a second time."

Summers knew what Crockett was thinking. It would be difficult to explain matters before the rabble that was crowding around. Despite Crockett's obstinate anger, he drew him to one side and told him all that had transpired, including Crenshaw's challenge. When he had concluded, Crockett placed his hand on his shoulder and gave it a warm squeeze.

"By dogs! I knew you were made of the right stuff, Will. Do you aim to fight this two-penny limb o' the law?"

"Yes—in a way he will remember. As the challenged party, I believe I have the choice of weapons. Isn't that right?"

"I'm no great shakes on the rules of fightin' with skunks, Will, but if I was in your place I'd ignore him. If you kill him it'll just leave a lot of smell on your hands."

"Leave that to me, Colonel. And if I were in your place I wouldn't say a word to these people about the matter. They were told you would be here. Very well, you are here. The tables are turned now. You are here and the other fellow isn't. Let them think what they will."

Crockett chuckled. "That's slick! I'm mighty glad to have you on my side at last. I'd 'a' gone before these people burnin' hair and powder and raisin' a stink that would smoke out a bear. But you're right. We'll just prod the devil with his own pitchfork."

"And say nothing about my being on your side."

"Why not?"

"Because, if Crenshaw is less of a coward than I think him, I'll have to fight him in a day or two. It wouldn't do for a Crockett man to be duelling with the leader of the other camp. You would be drawn into it for a full measure of blame. Just keep your lips closed and let the people think the hounds have fallen to fighting over the hide. Now that you are here, I can leave—supposedly on the heels of my sick leader."

"But the people will ask questions. They know that you had a fight with Crenshaw."

"That was no fight, Colonel. Wait a few days and you will hear of a fight."

4

That evening, at dusk, Summers sat with Bullard under the great oak in front of the store at The Forks.

"You can't afford to go through with this thing, Will," Lon protested for the hundredth time.

"I can't afford to do anything else, as I have told you again and again," Summers replied. "If he sends a messenger to renew his challenge, which I doubt, he will find me ready. I told him you would act for me, but I don't want to drag you into it. I've picked another man."

"Who?" Bullard's voice indicated a hurt pride.

"Abel Roundtree."

"Good Lord, Will! He won't do at all. Why, he doesn't know the first thing about——"

"Exactly. But he'll make it funny. I want to get all the fun out of it I can. They will do everything so perfectly proper and according to the code, and when Abel starts mussing around—can't you see, Lon, it's what you might call the ultimate insult?"

"You mustn't do it, Will."

"Why not? I'm single, with no one depending on me. If a man like President Jackson can fight a duel, I see no reason why one of his supporters should be denied the same privilege."

"And Jackson got shot for his pains," Lon reminded him.

"Yes, but he got his man."

Bullard shook his head dismally. "I don't understand you, Will. Do you want to kill Crenshaw?"

"No. If he does not follow it up I am satisfied. I slapped him when I should have kicked him. That is my only regret. However, I don't want Crenshaw to kill me, either. Listen, Lon: I'm wagering everything—my life, maybe—that he is a coward. I have made three guesses in the matter. If I am wrong on any one of them, I lose. My first guess is that he will never send a challenge, but——" A sound interrupted him. "Listen! What's that?"

From down the south road came the faint sound of galloping horses, rhythmical and steady in its cadence.

"If those horsemen come from Crenshaw, I have missed my first guess," Summers said. "That leaves me with two other guesses. The odds are fair enough."

"What are the others?" Bullard asked.

"I will tell you after the duel—if I have guessed right."

5

Two horsemen, shadowy and indistinct in the twilight, rounded the clump of trees at the forks of the road and came galloping toward the store. Bullard's stone pipe, glowing like a firefly in the glooms under the tree, attracted their attention. They halted abruptly, conversing for a moment in low tones. One man dis-

mounted, leaving his horse with the other rider, and came toward the two men under the tree. In the deep shadows it was impossible to distinguish faces but both Summers and Bullard knew from the dress of the man that he was a townsman.

"Gentlemen," the stranger addressed them, "I am looking for Mr Bullard."

Lon arose. "I am Bullard."

"My name is Thornhill, Mr Bullard." He bowed stiffly but did not offer his hand. "I come on a somewhat unpleasant mission. Only duty to a friend and the righting of a wrong could cause me to break in on the peace of your evening. I understand you are a friend of a Mr Summers, of this neighborhood."

"I am."

"Ah! Perhaps he has advised you of a certain—ah—unpleasant affair at Higgins' store this morning?"

"He has."

"You are to act in his behalf?"

Summers arose from his chair in the shadows and came forward.

"My name is Summers," he announced.

Startled and surprised, Thornhill bowed, but far more stiffly than he had bowed to Bullard.

"Perhaps I violate the courtesies of the code," Summers continued, "but I do not feel that I should burden Lon with this matter. I am ready to act in my own behalf—at least until the actual time of meeting. At that time Mr Roundtree will act for me."

"Ah! Well, well! This is most irregular, Mr Summers. Doubtless you know the object of my call?"

"I do."

"And you stand ready to give my principal—ah—satisfaction?"

"Certainly."

"You are acquainted with your rights and privileges in such—er—affairs?—er—ah—matters is the better word."

"I am not schooled in them, and the word doesn't matter. It remains a fight. I have the choice of weapons, I believe. I don't know who has the right to fix the time and the place, nor do I care. I will fix the conditions under which I will meet Mr Crenshaw. He can accept them or leave them, as he chooses or as his bravery permits."

Thornhill drew himself to his full height. "We are not here to discuss courage, Mr Summers."

"Not at all. I will choose the knife." Summers closely watched the effect of the statement.

"Um-m! Ah!" said Thornhill.

"I will meet him wherever he chooses, to-morrow night," Summers continued. "We are to be bound together, face to face, with thongs. Our left hands will be tied behind our backs. Each man will then be given a knife, of whatever pattern he may select, and at the word each may start whittling. The survivor can cut the thongs."

Thornhill recoiled a step. "Man, you are insane! That is savagery."

"Perhaps. Then you think Mr Crenshaw would prefer firearms?"

"Most assuredly, sir. He is a gentleman."

"That last is welcome information. I did not know.

Then firearms it shall be. I will choose . . . the rifle."

Again Thornhill made a perceptible movement of surprise. He had expected the pistol to be named.

"But since my skill with the rifle is somewhat greater than his," Summers continued, "he may arm himself with a fowling piece loaded with slugs."

Thornhill coughed and sputtered. "Most unusual, sir, most unusual! I fear you are not in your proper mind—ah—that is, thinking clearly. Please reconsider and leave the matter in the hands of your friend."

"No. And the conditions are these: Two miles down this road there is a deep wood and thicket of scrub oak on a little hill lying to the right of the road. It is quite prominent. Perhaps you observed it?"

"There are many such places, Mr Summers."

"Then I look to Bullard to acquaint you with its position, to-night. I understand Mr Crenshaw wants satisfaction."

"Exactly."

"And with all speed?"

"Of course."

"There is no moon now. To-morrow night, at ten o'clock, we will meet on the road near this place. Mr Roundtree will be there to act as my second. I will be armed with my rifle. It will be loaded and primed in your presence, as will be the gun of my opponent. Each of us will then be taken to the woods and stationed on opposite sides. Neither of us shall carry extra powder or balls. At a signal from the road we are to enter the woods and start looking for each other. With no moon now, the woods will be quite dark. Under such con-

ditions my aim will be less accurate than that of Mr Crenshaw. One ball against many—understand. Since we will have but one shot each, we can hardly afford to waste that shot. Either may fire when he is sure he has located his enemy. That is all.”

“Man! You are demented!” Thornhill raged. “I thought this was to be a meeting between gentlemen. This makes it nothing less than Indian warfare. It is preposterous.”

Summers laughed. “But think of the fun, Mr Thornhill. If one is to go to the devil he had as well have his last hour full of excitement. It would put a fellow on his nerve. He will see a dozen things he’d like to shoot at before he finds his man. And remember—Crenshaw can cut a pretty wide swath with a gun loaded with slugs.”

“Preposterous! That is no duel—it is a—ah—a man hunt, a murderous man hunt!”

“‘Thou shalt not kill,’” Summers quoted gravely. “Win or lose, I expect to pay the fiddler. I have been told that the recording angel never splits a hair or quibbles over a word. However, a man should have a choice as to how he goes to the devil, and if your man has no stomach for this plan, then he may have my first choice—the knife.”

“You are insane, Will,” Bullard spoke up.

“Or a very great yokel,” Thornhill added.

“Both,” Summers answered. “I was born in the backwoods and I was crazy enough to get hitched in the same yoke with Crenshaw. But you have your choice, Mr Thornhill. In either case the meeting place is the same.”

"Why do you insist upon that place?"

"Because I am unacquainted with it and do not believe that Crenshaw can know much about it. I have never entered it—and will not until to-morrow night. He will know as much about it as I."

"But he is no woodsman. Remember, Mr Crenshaw is a lawyer."

"Then perhaps he can find a way to get out of this. If so, I am satisfied. I struck him to silence him. If he is not at the meeting place to-morrow night I imagine he will be silenced forever. I bid you good night, sir. Mr Bullard will ride back along the road with you now to point out the place of meeting."

"But, sir—"

"Good night, Mr Thornhill."

Turning away, Summers walked across the road and entered the store. Going directly to the living quarters in the rear he lighted two candles on the table and, taking down one of Bullard's books, fell to reading. He heard Bullard stumbling around the brush-covered shed at the rear as he saddled his horse. A little later he heard horsemen gallop away.

He continued his reading with unconcern.

6

Near midnight Bullard returned. He found Summers still reading, the candles burned low. Summers looked up from his book.

"Thank you, Lon. You found the place?"

"Yes, you pig-headed fool!" In exasperation he flung

himself into a chair, knowing that words would have no effect.

Summers watched him for a moment, wishing that he might do something. What a strange friendship! It seemed that he was *forever* going against Lon's will, yet the bonds that held them grew the tighter.

"I'm sorry if I have offended you," he said.

Lon looked at him quickly. It was the first time Summers had ever admitted the slightest hint of sorrow over a hasty action.

"You haven't offended me, Will, but you are a fool to fight that way. Crenshaw can riddle you with slugs."

"Oh! So Thornhill chose that plan?"

"He didn't say. He merely assured me that they would be present and expressed the hope that I would bring my influence to bear in effecting a more gentlemanly agreement."

"Lon," Summers was smiling, "do you know the definition of the word gentleman? For fear you don't, I'll give it to you. My father once told me that a gentleman is a man who so conducts himself as to never find it necessary to remind someone that he is a gentleman. If Crenshaw is as savage as his bark, he will choose the knife."

"Yes, and then what?"

"Then I have missed my second guess and the third one won't matter. The third one had to do with a man having only one shot and being in a dark woods where he knows another man is looking for him. If he gets jumpy he will see a lot of things." He yawned, sleepily. "I guess I'll sleep here to-night. Let's go to bed, Lon."



Chapter Three

THE DUEL

I

AT A LITTLE past nine the following night, Summers, Bullard and Abel started for the meeting place. Three abreast they rode down the dark roadway; Lon silent and depressed, Summers humming snatches from old songs; Abel keeping up a running fire of pointless conversation directed to no one in particular.

Abel was a tireless talker. When alone he talked to himself or to his horse. When in company with others he held his peace until conversation lagged. Then he manfully entered the breach. He abhorred a conversational vacuum. When riding with other men, and silence came, he at once directed conversation to any and all who would hear and respond. Failing either, he would talk to his horse, a big, strong, spiritless chestnut who bore up nobly under the double burden imposed upon him.

That morning Will had ridden over to Abel's place to acquaint him with the duties that would fall upon him with the coming of night. Abel openly rejoiced and had talked about it the live-long day, rehearsing his part again and again. But in the last hour silence had fallen upon his two friends and there was only Pete, the big chestnut, left to listen.

As they rode along, Abel was deep in a mumbled so-

liloquy when he was seized with a sudden inspiration.

"Will," he addressed Summers, "it's goin' to look kinda bad fer you to shoot this lawyer."

"Yes, or any other man. Why the lawyer in particular?"

"It's this way. A sight o' folks know you've got a hankerin' to be a lawyer and they might think you done this to sorta make a little more room fer yerself. Now I've got an idee. It's blacker'n the doors to hell to-night and when we git to the meetin' place it'll be your job to hang around a little to one side and look oninterested. So you jes' turn around now and go on back home. Lon and me will go on and Lon'll tell 'em that you changed yore mind about me actin' fer you, and that he's doin' the honors. At ten feet they couldn't tell me from you. I'll find this feller in the woods, shoot a laig out from under him and come on back home. That-a-way ever'boday'll be satisfied—'ceptin' maybe the man that gits shot."

Summers laughed. "That's a splendid idea, Abel. Do you suppose anyone would ever find out that you substituted for me?"

Abel fell into the trap. "Course not. Never."

"Then I'd get the blame for it. I had as well do my own shooting, Abel. You're just wanting to have all the fun. Pick your own quarrels if you want to fight duels."

"I'm not a fightin' man, Will, but I'm gittin' mad. Maybe it's what you call honorable, but you'll always be pointed out as the man who shot Crenshaw."

"I know. I've thought of that. In case I have to shoot him, then we'll go to Texas."

"Who?"

"You and Lon and I."

"We ain't shot anybody," Abel protested. Then after a few minutes, "How far is Texas, Will?"

"A long ways. Eight hundred miles—maybe more."

"Gawd A-mighty!" Abel exclaimed and then, for once, lapsed into silence. He knew now that circumstances had at last brought about the very thing Summers had wanted, though not at this price. He knew, too, just as did Bullard, that this youth, much younger in years than either of them, was their actual leader. A magnetism had drawn them to him and it would hold through all vicissitudes. Theirs was a partnership in friendship, existing without thought of profit and accepting all the responsibilities of friendship without weighing them or once striking a balance. Perhaps it was more than friendship, for love is the only indissoluble passion, and Summers had unconsciously stated the full measure of their affection when he said, "In that case we will go to Texas." Where he went, they would go.

Summers, riding now in silence, realized the same thing that had just come to Abel. A few short weeks ago Lon and Abel had leagued against him to argue him out of the idea of leaving Tennessee. To their minds there was no clear reason for it. But now, in an hour of trouble, how different it was. Duelling was beginning to have an odium about it. Even the victor in time became vanquished and fled to newer countries. Yes, if Crenshaw turned up . . . if he went into the woods . . . Well, he could follow the sun at last, and with friends. It was great to have friends.

Again he started humming the fragments of a song.

2

They were first to reach the place of meeting, but only by minutes. From down the road came the sound of horses trotting briskly and the creak and screech of iron shod wheels striking against resisting stones.

"They are on time," Summers commented as he handed his rifle to Roundtree. "Ride ahead, Abel, and make the arrangements. Lon and I will remain here until you call."

"What if he takes the knife, Will?" Abel asked.

"He won't. Remember, now, you are to load both guns and neither of us is to carry any powder. You can't suggest searching gentlemen, but you can quietly remove both ramrods."

Abel trotted forward to meet the carriage. It halted at his approach.

"Mr. Bullard?" a voice called from the carriage.

"Nope. Roundtree. I'm actin' in Bullard's place."

"Oh, yes, quite so! I remember now." The speaker stepped out of the carriage and approached Abel. "My name is Thornhill," he said. "Your principal is here?"

"Shore is."

"You have come on horseback, Mr Roundtree?"

"Shore."

"Ah! Have you—er—brought your physician?"

"We ain't sick," Abel answered and smiled broadly, knowing that the darkness masked his appreciation of his own humor.

"This is most irregular, Mr Roundtree. You have brought no carriage; you have no way to care properly for your principal in case—er—that is——"

"Never thought of it. Summers acted like he figgered on ridin' home."

"You boast, Mr Roundtree."

"No, sir. Not me. Maybe Will does, by his actions, but he's young and you'll have to overlook sech things. It does look like he'd orghter thought of bringin' along the wagon, but he's single and like as not had jes' as lief be buried where he lights. I see yore man is more partickler. But come on, let's git the fat to fryin'. What does yore man want—knife or gun?"

"Mr Crenshaw reconciles himself to Mr Summers' second choice of the guns. Naturally he was reluctant to accept such odds but——"

"Natcherly," said Abel.

"But I pointed out that it was only fair, since your principal is so skilled with the rifle."

"He shore is," Abel agreed.

"However, we still entertain the hope that you can prevail upon Mr Summers to follow a more—ah—gentlemanly procedure, and——"

"Will's bullheaded."

"And with that hope in mind we have brought along two duelling pistols."

"You didn't bring the fowling piece?" Abel asked.

"Of course. Please understand, Mr Roundtree, that Mr Crenshaw knows no fear. He merely desires a more gentlemanly meeting."

"Will is savage and sot in his way," Abel replied.

"Fetch yore gun and I'll load it. We won't git anyplace argeyin' with Will."

Thornhill turned back to the carriage and for a moment stood conversing in low tones with Crenshaw and the physician. Presently he came back and handed a single-barreled fowling piece to Abel for inspection.

"Empty?" Abel asked.

"Certainly."

Abel primed the gun with powder and flashed it. The flash startled Thornhill. In that moment of light he saw that the gun was pointed squarely at his stomach.

"Have a care, man!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing?"

"Jes' seein' if you could be mistaken about it bein' loaded. Once I rammed a load in on top of another one and it nigh kicked my head off. I don't want yore man to lose any teeth. Here, better come up closter and watch the loadin'."

"This is an affair of honor, Mr Roundtree," Thornhill reminded sharply.

"So it is. I had fergot."

With great care Abel poured in the powder and rammed it home.

"These buckshot and slugs sound like clods on a coffin," he said, rattling them noisily in the pouch. "How many you want put in?"

"A good load, sir."

"One's enough—if it hits, but I reckon a feller ought to have some waste."

Again the rod thudded dully in the barrel as Abel rammed it up and down.

"There," he handed the gun to Thornhill with the powder horn. "You'll want to prime it and shut the pan. I'll jes' keep the ramrod. There'll be no use fer it."

"We had hardly expected further insult, sir."

"You ain't gittin' it. I'm takin' Will's rod, too."

"Have you loaded his piece?"

"Not yet. You can trust me to see it is done right."

"With a ball, remember, not with——"

"This is an affair of honor," Abel reminded him. "But here's the ball. Better feel of it."

Thornhill rolled the ball in his fingers and handed it back. "That is satisfactory, Mr Roundtree."

Again the sound of a rod working up and down in a resounding barrel.

"She's ready," Abel announced. "Hadn't we better call the others up now?"

"Yes. Mr Crenshaw! Step forward, please."

"Come a-runnin', Will," Abel sang out. "The fat's a-sizzlin'."

"Gentlemen," Thornhill began final instructions as two shadowy forms came forward and halted at a distance great enough to evidence their antagonism, "the rules, imposed by the challenged party, are as follows: Mr Summers is to take up a position at the north edge of the woods. I will accompany him to his position. Mr Crenshaw is to take up a position at the south edge. Mr Roundtree will accompany him. After we leave the road here, our physician, Dr Morrill, will wait ten minutes, allowing us time to reach the positions, and will then fire a shot from a pistol. At that signal both principals will enter the woods and Mr Roundtree and I will

return to this point to await—ah—er—developments. Are you ready, gentlemen?"

"Ready," both men answered and turned away. Summers was followed by Thornhill, who bore his rifle, while Abel went with Crenshaw, bearing his gun.

Bullard came forward and joined Dr Morrill, who stood holding one of the carriage horses by the bridle.

"A sorry business, sir," the doctor said.

"It is. I hope there will be no need of your services, Doctor."

"Crenshaw is a fool, even though he is a prospective patient," the doctor growled. "Why, man, he has no chance in such an encounter! No, not even were he armed with a blunderbuss. Summers is a woodsman; Crenshaw a lawyer. Ha! For once the woodsman has outguessed the lawyer. It is suicide—or murder. You may choose the word."

"I like neither," said Bullard.

3

Abel walked swiftly up the hill leading to the edge of the woods. Behind him came Crenshaw, stumbling and puffing in an effort to keep pace. His eyes seemed unable to pierce the darkness. Several times he stumbled over objects which Abel easily avoided. Once he fell sprawling, his hands clutching wildly for support.

"Damn such business!" he growled, his hands holding his fat little stomach. "Had I known I was dealing with a savage I would not have honored him with a challenge. I would have treated him as a savage."

"Will is wild," Abel agreed. "And about the best shot in Tennessee, I reckon. . . . Well, here's our place."

"You are sure? . . . Very well, hand me the gun."

Abel drew back. "Wait till we hear the shot."

Crenshaw grunted like a goaded ox. "I hope you do not fear me," he said.

"I hope I don't neither," Abel answered. "That's a mighty dark coat you've got on, Mr Crabshaw."

"Crenshaw is the name. Did you think I would wear white?"

"Will's wearin' a clean buckskin shirt. Danged if I don't think he put it on a-purpose. It'll show mighty plain. But then, Will ain't afeared of the devil. Nerve like that feller has is a prime thing to have—'specially when it's needed, Mr Bradshaw."

"Crenshaw, I tell you. Not Bradshaw."

"Oh, yes! Names don't stick with me. As I was sayin', nerve is a great thing. I'll bet Will never thought of wearin' black. If he had thought of it like as not he'd 'a' put on a sheet, jes' to be stubborn. He's the recklessest boy I ever seen. Why, sir, once when we was out huntin' b'ars——"

"Great God! Hold your tongue!" Crenshaw exploded. His nerves were at the breaking point and he was no longer able to endure Roundtree's stream of conversation. "I care nothing about your bears."

"It wasn't the b'ar I was goin' to tell you about, but about what Summers done. Jest as we come up clost to this old she-b'ar, Will he up and——"

"Will you hold your tongue!"

"Shore, if it bothers you. I thought 'fore you went into them woods it was my bond to let you know some-thin' about how Will tricked that she-b'ar."

A pistol shot sounded down on the road. Sleeping hounds, startled by the echoing report, began baying at one another across the miles of countryside.

"Give me the gun," Crenshaw said as he took it from Abel with unsteady hands.

"Good-bye, Mr Henshaw." Abel offered his hand. "Remember, he's wearin' a buckskin shirt. Most anything you see that's sorta white is liable to be him."

With an oath Crenshaw wheeled and rushed into the woods.

Chuckling quietly, Abel retraced his way to the road.

4

Crenshaw had determined upon a plan which he thought would advantage him. He would make all possible haste to the center of the woods and there lie in ambush, waiting for the sound of the stalking woodsman. But darkness multiplied the obstacles. Wild brambles tore at his legs, holding him back; dried sticks cracked loudly under his feet. He felt that he was making as much noise as a horse in a stalk field. Twice he was nearly thrown, and once the muzzle of his gun struck a tree which he had not seen at all.

He stopped behind a large tree to listen. That moment fear came and strangled his resolution. He could not command the courage to leave the protection of the tree. The woods became peopled by a thousand stalking hunt-

ers. Off to the right something rustled the dead leaves of last year. To the left a startled animal fled precipitously. A soft wind, unnoticed before, moved through the tree tops and somewhere directly ahead a heavy branch, chafing against another, groaned in complaint.

Crenshaw crouched lower and lower, knowing now that he could never summon the courage to push on to the center of the woods. So long as he had advanced boldly, recklessly, his own crashing progress had smothered other sounds. Now, as the listener, sounds tormented him. Trees became animated. They actually moved.

The whole world, and all that life held, had narrowed to a little tract of timber land, indescribably small, momentarily contracting, and hideous with sound.

A screech owl, directly above, began its plaintive call. Startled, Crenshaw moved quickly and the owl broke off in the middle of its cry. Crenshaw knew that to a listening woodsman this was like publishing the presence of an enemy. Damn the bird! Were the things of the wild against him? Was the wilderness the ally of Summers?

Then, like a flood crest, it came to him that this was precisely the case. Summers *was* allied with the wild. He would use it all to his advantage, stalking man as he had stalked animals, save that in this instance he need not concern himself with scent. It would be far easier than coming upon a wild thing blessed with superior faculties. God! It was the other man's game!

Crenshaw felt the last spark of courage flicker and die. In his own domain he had walked with arrogant pride, living by what he termed his wits and his skill.

Never before had he realized that his security and pride of place were heritages of an age-old race that had forced its way up from the insecurity of cave dwelling. Now, suddenly reduced to the primitive, he was helpless as a babe. He was witless and without skill. Instinct, that sure guide of the animal and skilled hunter, had in him become atrophied by disuse through generations of forebears who had elected to plot their course by reason.

But even reason was now dead in Crenshaw, strangled by the lethean river of fear. Panic, the ready hangman of admitted helplessness, came forward with his throttling rope. Disorder ruled the brain.

A twig snapped directly ahead. Something moved by the side of a tree less than twenty feet away. It appeared lighter than the background. It moved a little, halted, then moved back. No question about it now. It was a man in buckskin.

Crenshaw lifted his gun silently as he licked fevered lips. So the fool would come into the woods wearing a light garment, eh? That was witless enough. Ha! Reason would triumph again, just as it had always triumphed. . . . That babbling fool Roundtree had talked too much. But wait! Perhaps he was not such a fool as he seemed. . . . Perhaps . . .

He hesitated to pull the trigger. He must be sure. There was but one shot. Certainty marked the line between life and death.

Again the thing he was watching moved. It seemed to come forward a step, then bent over in listening attitude, lifted again to its full height. A sound came, like buckskin trousers chafing under a swift stride.

There could be no question now—no time to waste. Crenshaw took careful aim and fired.

The woods roared and re-echoed with the sound. Birds, startled from sleep, flew twittering through the tree tops, beating their wings against the leaves.

Crenshaw crouched behind his tree, trying to see through the heavy pall of black powder smoke that clung to the ground. What he had fired at was gone now. He smiled. Not gone, but down. From a hillside cabin beyond the road a single hound howled dolorously. Again Crenshaw smiled. So the old legend was true—dogs knew when souls passed.

Then Crenshaw remembered that his sweating hands now held an empty gun. What if he had missed? Maybe Summers was lying on the ground, waiting for a move. Or, God in Heaven! what if he had been mistaken?

The powder smoke was clearing away. The thing was there again, moving back and forth, bending up and down. A little more breeze now, and dry leaves scraped and crackled.

Merciful God! The *thing* was a blasted scrub oak about the height of a man. Its seared leaves, brownish-yellow, were moved by the breeze. They crackled dryly. Damn them! They had hung on for a year for no reason but to betray him. The dead mocking the living.

Crawling cautiously, Crenshaw began a retreat. But caution is well handled only by the brave and requires time for proper employment. There was no time now. Death was at his heels.

Wild brambles tore at his hands as he crawled. An unseen stub, sharp at the end, gashed his cheek at the

corner of one eye and brought a stream of blood. He halted to listen. How strangely quiet the woods now. . . . No, something moved behind . . . Close, almost upon him.

He arose and broke into a run as swift as his short, nerveless legs would carry him. Near the edge of the wood, marked by the light in the clearing, he slowed to a walk, breathing hard. Then, almost from under his feet a form rose up, barring his path.

"I believe it is my shot now, Mr Crenshaw." It was the voice of Summers, deadly cold, impersonal, and without hint of pity.

Screaming like a man gone mad, Crenshaw hurled his empty gun at Summers and turning fled back into the cover of the woods.

Summers did not so much as lift his gun. He stood for a moment listening to Crenshaw plunging through the brush like a frightened bear. With a chuckle, not unlike Abel's, he turned and started for the road.



Chapter Four

CROCKETT WINS A MATCH

I

NEAR noon the next day Crockett came riding to Bullard's store. He was on his way to make political speeches in the eastern end of the district and had ridden to The Forks in the hope of finding Summers there. His hope was realized. Summers and Abel had spent the night with Lon and were now seated under the oak, arguing the advantages and disadvantages of taking up residence in Texas. Crockett greeted them warmly and then went directly to the thing uppermost in his mind.

"Will," he said to Summers, "I don't want you to fight this fellow Crenshaw."

"Very well, Colonel, I won't."

Crockett eyed him in surprise. He had expected obstinate argument. Abel's laugh gave Crockett no clew but it spurred Summers on to an explanation.

"I couldn't overtake him on foot," he said, "and it would hardly be fair to chase him on horseback."

"I don't understand what you mean," Crockett said.

Summers hesitated a moment. This gave Abel his chance. Why let Will tell about it? He would gloss over the high lights. So reasoning, Abel plunged into a full and colorful recital of the events of the past evening. He left little to the imagination. Wherever truth became a handicap to drama he abandoned truth. Abel had the

ability to take a modicum of truth and effectively garnish it with large helpings of pure fancy.

Crockett chuckled gleefully over the recital. "What did Thornhill say when he had to start back without his pet?" he asked.

"He seemed right put out," Abel answered. "Fact is, he sorta hinted that me and Lon ought to go up in the woods and find him. But Will told him that at the speed he was movin' when he last saw him he'd probably be eight-ten mile away by that time."

"That's the last of Crenshaw in this neighborhood," Crockett said. "He won't have the nerve to show up in Madison County agin. Will, I'd be a sight better off if you had joined forces with me sooner. They run from your gun faster than they do from my speakin'. But you keep out of this from now on. You can't go around fightin' ever'body on the other side. You've smoked out the real rat, which is a mighty sight more than I could do."

"Then I suppose we had as well start for Texas."

Crockett looked at him quickly. "We?"

"Abel, Lon and I."

Crockett looked at the others in turn. They made no sign. If they were opposed to such a plan their faces did not betray it.

"Then I'm not much ahead on the deal," Crockett said, his eyes twinkling with humor. "You run one vote off and then take two away with you. I can't stand much more of that kind of help. What's your hurry to get to Texas?"

The question was disturbing. Summers was sorry it

had been asked in the presence of Lon and Abel. It would be idle, foolish, to prate about wanting to follow the sun because it led to—nowhere.

"My brother Jim is there," he said at last, "and he writes that it is a great country. And," he seized upon the thought, "he says Austin wants more men from the States—especially men from Tennessee."

"Huh! We've got a great country here, Will, and we need enough Tennesseans to make old Hero put back them dee-posit—s—and I hope I may be shot if I don't lead the pack against him. Let's get some good, sound government here at home first."

"You forget I am a Jackson man, Colonel."

Crockett scratched his head a little sheepishly. "So I had. I supposed that when you swallowed the devil you took in his horns. But I can see 'em stickin' out now. Let me get this straight: You turned against Fitz because you found him out; now you're going to Texas to keep from having to cast a vote for an anti-Jackson man."

Bullard shifted uneasily, expecting Summers to flare into resentment. He prickled all over with fear when the irrepressible Abel broke in with:

"Dogged if you ain't named it, Colonel. Will's the contrariest man I ever seen. He's got Texas in his teeth and I've got to go along to keep him out of trouble. I think the only reason he wants to go is because me and Lon don't."

"You are both wrong," Summers answered. "I am going to Texas because it is a land of opportunity."

"Will gits opportunity and excitement all mixed up,

Colonel," Abel explained. "He's never so happy as when he's doin' somethin' folks don't want him to do. When his Pappy died he stayed right on the old place with his Mammy, tryin' to make a livin' on a piece of land that's thinner than the hair on the back of a mangy dog. Half a dozen different neighbors tried to git him to hire out, but do you think he would do it? The old place——"

"Wait a minute, Abel," Summers protested.

"Wait nothin'! This is my story and damn my skin if I don't tell it! So far I've kept my mouth shut about this Texas business, but this one time I'm a-goin' to say my piece. As I was sayin', Colonel, the old Summers place ain't nothin' much but a red clay bank. Will done his best on it, though, plowin' and farmin' in the day-time and readin' out of books at night. Lon's been a sort of Pappy to him. Will's read ever' one of them books in Lon's store. For the past four-five years he's been talkin' about bein' a lawyer, and it does look like he's smarter'n some I know. Lon and me has been tickled to death about it. Danged if it didn't look like me and Lon was goin' to make somethin' out of him. Then the first thing we know he begins talkin' about Texas and fergits all about bein' a lawyer. I says to him one day, 'Will, why don't you start in bein' a lawyer?' and he said, 'Abel, a feller has to study to be a lawyer,' and I says, 'Well, from what I've seen of some he don't have to study much'."

Crockett laughed. "You are right, Abel. Over in my old district I was elected magistrate and I hope to hang if I knew one law book from another. The lawyers would come before me with a couple of big law books

under their arms and they would shout around and read things I'd never heard of before and spout a lot of foreign language that didn't make sense. But Crockett could cipher, slick enough. I'd just divide what they had to say by two, subtract the same amount from the result and that left me right where I started. Then I'd just use common sense and I hope I may never see the dee-positis put back if I didn't nearly always drive the nail. Do you really want to be a lawyer, Will?"

"There is no chance for that."

"You are wrong. I'll give you the chance."

"You, sir?"

"Yes, me. This is the luckiest morning you've had in many a day. You can thank your stars that Abel let the cat out of the bag about your wanting to be a lawyer. It puts me in a position to return a favor if you'll promise to meet me in Jackson, on Thursday of next week."

"For what purpose?"

"It's this way: Major Langstone, a lawyer friend of mine from Washington, is to be in Jackson next week. I think he's here fixing some fences for the Little Flying Dutchman, Van Buren. Old Hickory's not only king now, but he's determined to say who the crown will go to next. Major Langstone, if I am not mistaken, is in this State doing some work toward that very end."

"I thought you said the Major was your friend?" Summers said, not a little surprised.

"He is. Hang it, man! we are not all like Jackson. Some of us can be friends even though eating at opposite ends of the trough. Major Langstone is that kind of a man. I have been in his home many times, even

though he knew I wouldn't bow the knee to the Hero or wear his collar. Langstone once said to me, 'Crockett, between sessions you ought to come in my office and study law. You would make a great statesman if you knew the law.' I told him I didn't see any sense in stuffing my head full of laws that the President could break faster than I could learn 'em. By dogs! I had him there! The Major is getting a little old and he's more interested in politics than he is in keeping up a law office. I could fix it up so he would take you in. He is smarter than jimpson, and if he can't make a lawyer out of you, nobody can."

"It is out of the question, Colonel. I haven't enough money."

"Shucks! I'm not more than a hop and a jump ahead of the wolves myself, but I'm running for Congress just the same."

"But you will have a salary. I can't live on air."

"You won't have to. Lord knows there are plenty of jobs in Washington for anybody who is a Jackson man—and not a lick in the kettle for any who ain't. All you'll have to do is let out a couple of yells, 'Hurrah for Old Hickory.' If you yell loud enough, and in the right place, like as not you'll find yourself at the head of some department. Maybe in the Cabinet. Most of them are there for the yellin' they've done."

"We simply do not understand each other, Mr Crockett." Summers' voice was cold, his eyes hard. "I am not a Jackson man for what I can get out of it."

"I am beginning to understand *you*," Crockett said approvingly. "I'm fit to be hung if I don't believe you

would make an *honest* lawyer. That's all the more reason why you should go. Forget what I said about the Jackson job. Sometimes Crockett talks too much. You can find something to do down there that will keep your stomach fillin' your britches—even if you have to wear smaller britches."

"Thank you, Colonel, but it's impossible. I haven't the funds."

"Don't be a fool, Will!" Bullard put in eagerly. "It is a great chance. You are always talking about opportunity. Here it is. You know I will help. You can pay me back when you begin to earn some fees."

"No, Lon, I couldn't accept that."

"Then I'll buy your place. And I'll buy your stallion, Hard Cash. By George! That was a lucky name. Hard Cash he is. I've wanted him a long time. I'll give you three hundred dollars for him. Fix your own price on the farm."

Summers gave him a soft, warm smile of appreciation. "I'd hate to part with Hard Cash. He wouldn't understand. As for the farm, just what would you do with it, Lon?"

"I've been thinking about doing a little farming."

"You? Farm? That is a joke. Besides, you heard what Abel said about it—'Thin as the hair on a mangy dog'."

"In places," Abel amended quickly. "But there's places that 'ud grow cotton high enough to be picked from horseback. That stretch of bottom land down on the crick, if it was broke out, would grow corn so high you'd have to bend it down at night to let the moon git past,

and if you sowed clover it 'ud hit a-bloomin'. I'd dicker with you myself fer it if I wasn't feelin' so porely. Only last week I says to Lon, 'Lon,' says I, 'if Will lights out fer Texas, like as not I'll haft to go along to keep him out of trouble. You buy that place of his and if you haft to pay him twict what he ought to ask you'll still be stealin' it.' Yes, sir, I said that very thing and I can prove it by Lon."

"You are both liars," Will laughed, "but I like you for it. The whole thing is out of the question."

For an hour the three men argued with him but he was steadfast in his refusal. Abel lost his patience and began walking around in small circles, talking to himself. Bullard held evenly to his purpose. Crockett, sensing where the influence lay, discreetly held his tongue for a long while. At last, when the others had failed, he decided to try a ruse.

"You think you are a pretty fair shot, don't you, Will?" Crockett spoke as though he had dismissed the other proposition from his mind.

"What do *you* think, Colonel?"

"By Cracks! He hit me there! Yes, I think you are. Since you did so well on your gamble last night, I reckon you wouldn't mind another little gamble."

"That depends on the chances."

"I'll give you a better chance than you gave yourself last night when you met Crenshaw. I'll shoot you a one-shot match, at forty yards, to see whether you go to Washington or Texas—providing I can make a satisfactory arrangement with Major Langstone. If I win, then you go to Washington and for once in your life do

what your friends think best. If I lose, you can go where you please."

"I have beaten you before, Colonel."

"Yes, and fair. But I've been practicin' some since then. I said to myself, 'Crockett, if that fellow gets too good with a rifle, first thing you know the people will be sending him down to Congress.' What do you say? Is it a match?"

"Will, if you can't beat him shootin', danged if I'm goin' to start to Texas with you," Abel taunted.

Summers jerked up his head quickly. "You are right. It's a match, Colonel. The difference between a pioneer and a lawyer is the ability to shoot. At forty yards, Colonel; one shot each."

Bullard paced off the distance. With his hunting knife he blazed a small spot on a tree, marking the center of the blaze with a cross. Picking up one of the small chips he spit upon it and said:

"You call, Colonel."

"Wet!" Crockett called as the chip spun in air. "I don't want to get in the habit of shoutin' dry for fear some of these newfangled temperance men might mistake me."

Bullard stooped to examine the chip. "Wet it is. Your choice, Colonel."

"Then I'll shoot first. If my shot doesn't make him nervous, nothin' will."

His shot was only a hair from the center of the blaze. "It might be closer," he said when he had examined the mark, "but that's close enough to make a lawyer out of you, Will."

"Didn't I hear you say you were a magistrate at one time?" Summers asked.

"Yes."

"Then wait until all the evidence is in," Summers said as he threw up his gun and fired.

Bullard was first at the tree. There was but one hole—Crockett's shot. He examined the bark around the edges of the blaze.

"By Gosh, Will! You missed the whole tree!"

The four men gathered around the tree, examining the bark, poking their knives into worm holes in an effort to locate the ball.

"I told you he wanted to be a lawyer," Abel said. "He was jes' too bullheaded to admit it."

Summers flushed and frowned, looking from face to face in an effort to determine whether Crockett or Bullard had taken Abel's jest seriously.

"Colonel, I assure you I shot to win," he said. "With another shot I can prove it."

"There's the lawyer for you," Crockett winked at Bullard. "Wantin' to appeal his case. No, sir, the bargain was one shot and I figger I haven't done such a bad morning's work. You will meet me in Jackson—next Thursday?"

"That was the bargain. I'll keep my word."

A short time after Crockett's departure a settler came down to the store for supplies. Bullard went in to wait on him, leaving Summers and Abel under the oak. In a preoccupied way Abel began digging in the dirt with a stick.

"Will," he said slowly, "you didn't fire yore rifle be-

tween the time I loaded it last night and the time you fired jes' now agin Crockett, did you?"

"No. Why?"

"Well, sir, I reckon I'm the most absent-minded person in the county and maybe the whole State." He fumbled in his pocket for a moment, then stretched forth his hand, palm upward. In the palm lay a rifle ball.

"There's yore ball, Will. Danged if I didn't fergit to put it in yore rifle last night."

"Good Heavens! You certainly didn't give me much chance, did you?"

"Oh, I dunno! Same chanct I give Crenshaw. I rattled his shot around and made a sight of noise with 'em, but when I started pourin' I got excited like and spilt the whole bunch."

For a moment Summers was on the edge of a fine rage, but at last he threw back his head and laughed.

"Too bad Crenshaw didn't know that. What a fine, brave showing he would have made. But I'm glad you've told me, Abel. I can get out of going to Washington when Crockett hears this."

Again Abel began poking in the dirt. "Sometimes," he began, assuming indifference, "I think that as a lawyer you wouldn't be no manner o' good. A lawyer can't prove his case without a witness. I'm not only absent-minded and fergitful, but I'm the biggest liar in West Tennessee. You mention this to Crockett and if he don't laugh you out of court I'll take oath that you set the egg and hatched the idee. I'm kinda sorry it happened, though. Dogged if I wasn't gettin' sorta anxious to go to Texas."

Summers snorted his disgust.

"It's a fact," Abel insisted. "Lon and me both was aimin' to go as soon as you quit harpin' on it."

2

True to his word, on Thursday morning Summers rode into the little town of Jackson. He found Crockett awaiting him and together they rode to the house of a Mr Moore, where Major Langstone was stopping.

The Major, an erect, white-bearded old aristocrat, greeted Crockett with genuine warmth. With these two men political differences did not become personal animus. Both of them had that rare, God-given ability to see the man behind the banner. The Major also had the gift of meeting strangers as though they were old friends. Summers liked him at once.

"My host," Major Langstone explained as he led the way into the great living room, "is absent for the day. He had to ride out to his farm and suggested that Carolin, my ward, ride part of the way with him. He is a widower by a year, but, Egad, Crockett! I have not heard him mention it since he laid eyes on Carolin."

"I can understand that," Crockett answered. "When I saw her last she was just beginnin' to bloom. I didn't know she was comin' with you."

Major Langstone chuckled deeply, the laughter starting low enough to create considerable disturbance at his waist line and bubble up until it overflowed with the sound of water gurgling from a jug.

"Neither did I—until the last minute," he said. "But

you know Carolin, Colonel. She sets her head on a thing and waits until the last minute to make attack. This leaves you no chance to think up defenses. Besides, she storms defenses. Gad! What a soldier she would have made, Crockett. No quarter and no surrender. That's Carolin. She insisted on my giving her a chance to see this country. Hard trip? Poof! She dismissed it like that. Oh, well, I'm an old man, Crockett, an old man, but Egad, sir! I'll admit I don't mind being seen with such a beauty. Young man," he turned to Summers just as a tottering old negro entered with a tray of frosted glasses topped by a green hedge of mint, "I advise you to get a good grip on yourself before Carolin comes back. Here, this julep will give you some strength and resolution."

Summers took one of the juleps from the tray. "I violate my rule of two drinks a year," he said, "but if there is danger I must be prepared."

A clatter of hoofs sounded outside.

"There she comes now," said the major as he put down his glass and nodded toward the door. "Drink your julep, young man. Drink it down."

A moment later the door flew open and a flushed, breathless young woman rushed into the major's arms.

"Oh, Major! There is the most beautiful black horse—o-Oh!—" she broke off at sight of the unexpected guests. A warmer, deeper color flooded her cheeks. Recognizing Crockett she advanced with outstretched hand. "I didn't know you were here, Mr Crockett. I am so glad to see you."

"Mr Crockett? Come, come, Carolin! Have you out-

grown the Uncle? When I was last in Washington I was Uncle Davy to you. But, by dogs! the sight of you does me good! Remember what I used to tell you—that you looked just like a peach tree in full bloom?”

“Flatterer! Is that your horse out there, Uncle Davy?”

“Not the one you have eyes for. He belongs to this gentleman, who rides better blood than Crockett owns. Miss Buell, this is my friend, Will Summers.”

All confusion had left Carolin, but it now laid heavy hands on Summers. In vain effort to conceal it he bowed with the frigid grace of a well-trained page.

“Mr Summers is the man who ran Crenshaw out of the county,” Major Langstone explained.

Carolin’s deep brown eyes flashed her delight and approval. “Oh, wonderful! I nearly expired when that stiff-backed Mr Thornhill was explaining it to the Major. It was just too funny for words.”

“Not so funny,” Major Langstone objected, seeing that Summers was at a loss to know just how to take it. “It took a rare quality of bravery and——”

“Oh, I didn’t mean it that way! You know I didn’t mean that, Mr Summers.” She gave him a look that made him lose all interest in what she meant. “Truly I didn’t. It was the way Thornhill tried to cover up. Wasn’t it, Major?”

“Ahem! Well, my dear, I must confess I have not yet seen the humor of it. If Mr Summers keeps running the Jackson leaders out of this district it will keep us pretty busy picking new leaders. I thought you were a Jackson man, Mr Summers?”

“Oh, Major! Please!” Carolin protested. “Let’s not

talk politics. Let's talk about horses. I'm just dying to ride that black horse out there."

"Such a useless death, Miss Buell," Summers said. "I shall be honored—and I am sure Hard Cash will be delighted."

"Now? May I ride him now—while I am dressed for it?"

"As soon as we can change the saddles—and under one condition: Hard Cash wouldn't budge a step unless I went along. Colonel," he turned to Crockett, "I am taking your horse. Shall we start, Miss Buell?"

"But—but, Will," Crockett called as they started for the door. "The business—you forget what we came for."

"I did not know what I came for—until now," Summers answered and noted as they passed through the door that Carolin was not displeased.

Major Langstone sat down heavily. "Well, well!" he exclaimed, chuckling. "Egad, Colonel! What did I tell you? There goes another scalp for that little minx to hang up."

"I'm not so sure, Major. That fellow Summers is too level-headed to lose his scalp."

"Humph! You talk like a dratted fool! The kind of scalp I am speaking of has nothing to do with the head."

BOOK THREE: CAROLIN BUELL



Chapter One

A WOODSMAN COME TO TOWN

I

SUMMERS arrived in Washington in late September and took up residence in a boarding house a few blocks from Major Langstone's office. The major had made all arrangements, selecting a room that was comfortable and commodious yet well within the purse limits of one who must watch every expenditure.

Having established himself in his quarters, which task amounted to no more than unpacking an old flowered portmanteau of generous proportions, he went out alone to see some of the wonders of the city. He had made the trip dressed in buckskin, taking care to see that his only suit of linsey-woolsey was carefully packed. This must be saved for important occasions.

For the first few days after his arrival he continued to wear the buckskin, his interest and absorption in the wonders of the city being so complete as to make him unaware of the interest that he himself was creating.

But in a few days, as the novelty of the city wore off, he became conscious of the eyes of the curious. A woodsman was no novel sight in Washington. They had followed Jackson like a horde of locust. But a man standing six feet two commands attention in whatever garb he may affect and Summers was not one who could lose himself in a crowd. He simply did not mix.

It was natural that some of the tall tales surrounding Crockett should attach themselves to Summers once it became known that he was from Crockett's district. Children, unschooled in concealing curiosity, trotted after him on the street, asking questions and creating tales of wildest imaginings. Idlers manufactured tales; young belles, austere chaperoned or riding with gallant beaux, illy concealed their interest as they peeped from beneath bonnets or tilted parasols to watch this tall, handsome, romantically clad young giant go striding down the street. To them he was a knight of the wilderness, refreshingly original, too primitive to bow to convention, and physically fitted for valorous deeds. Men continued manufacturing stories about him until they saw, too late, that the women were interested. Then they began to tell lies.

Summers, seemingly unmindful of all this interest, though secretly dismayed and hurt, kept to the buckskin shirt and trousers because he knew that the suit of linsey-woolsey, which he had packed with such care, was far more out of date than the buckskin. To wear it would be a feeble, pathetic effort to copy style. He resented the thought that clothes should be a matter of interest and he began to consider the advisability of making purchases that would sink him into the obscurity of convention. He decided, however, that it would be much cheaper to keep off the streets.

One morning, when he had just finished a vigorous dusting and rearrangement of the disordered papers on the long walnut table in Major Langstone's inner office, the major entered, coughing and sputtering.

"Confound it, Will! I want you to leave this cleaning business to that black rascal Jim. I send him over here every night to sweep out and the next morning I find you in the middle of a cloud of dust."

"Jim doesn't sweep *out*, Major. He merely shifts it around. Most of it settles on your table and the chairs."

"He is a no account nigger," the major agreed, "and I'd sell him if I could find a buyer. But I don't want you doing a nigger's work."

"I'm not, Major, I was getting the dust off your table and arranging your papers."

"Damn it, man! That's just it! You arrange them and then I can't find them. Excellence in the law, sir, is evidenced by a well-ordered mind—not by a well-ordered table. Ah! Remember that, Will, remember that. *Animus maius res est*—mind is greater than matter. The old Latin knew, my boy, the old Latin knew. His books were few, his laws well coded, his instruments brief. But he carried a head, by the gods! he carried a head. Nowadays knowledge is put in books and we keep our heads vacant for senseless twaddle. A sorry day, sir, a sorry day! Sit down, please. I want to talk to you."

Summers took a seat at the end of the table and looked across into the deep-set flashing eyes of the white-bearded old patrician who sat so gingerly on the edge of his chair as to give the impression that he was about to arise in indignation and with a word blot out all the foibles of the new day and return mankind to the wisdom of yesterday. Standing, the major was always as erect as an aggrieved Indian; sitting, he bore the appearance of one who had just met surprise. His bright eyes

were always flashing, seeming to betray a joyous surprise over the thoughts that were trooping through his mind. He seemed always about to speak, but Summers had learned that he approached every subject with the gravity of a judge. Dispatch was not his motto. There was time for anything—for everything.

"My boy," Major Langstone spoke at last, studiously tapping his thumb with a pair of square rimmed spectacles, "there are a number of things I wish to discuss with you. First, however, I bring you an invitation which I want you to accept. Carolin is having a birthday party for her brother Jefferson to-morrow night and——"

"But Major! My clothes are——"

"Ah! You've hit it. That is another thing I meant to bring out, even though it is a subject I—ah—hesitate to discuss, fearing I might offend you."

"You will not offend me, sir. I am not blind. I see that my dress makes me one of the city's curiosities. To put it frankly, I am a woodsman come to town."

"Well, well! Ahem! Hardly that, my boy, hardly that."

"Exactly that, sir! If I felt sure that I had an aptitude for the law—were settled about it in my own mind—I would manage somehow to dress in a more conventional way. But I am a woodsman, Major, and I confess that I am already growing restless. I am beginning to think I have bitten off more than I can chew. The law is not easy to understand—especially when it has so many interpretations."

"Tut, tut! Law is not learned in a day. Remember,

Lex uno ore omnes alloquitur—the law speaks to all with one voice. It is the same to all men, or it loses its majesty. Of course men seek liberal and favorable interpretations, but put the blame on man, not on the law. But let us get back to the matter of dress. The day we arranged this matter out in Jackson, Crockett told me you were not rich in the world's goods. In fact, you offered the same excuse as a valid objection to your coming here. I understand your position. I suppose, however, that you have some—ah—funds for immediate use?"

"Yes, some. But if I use all now I will go without later. I'm something of a hand to save my white bread until I am hungry."

"An excellent rule, my boy, an excellent rule, but in this case unnecessary. I have secured a position for you—a clerkship—in one of the departments. The pay is quite enough to meet your needs. I will outline a course of reading for you, and in a year's time you can come into this office sufficiently equipped to relieve me of many burdens and earn fees quite large enough to meet your needs."

"I couldn't do that, Major."

"Couldn't do what?"

"Accept this government position."

"Nonsense! Why not? You are as well fitted for it as a great many of these popinjay departmental heads who strut around looking as if the whole government rested on their shoulders. Damme if I don't think you are better fitted! I am a blasted Republican if I don't think Jackson has gone too far with the way he

has filled the departments with a crowd of nit-wits who never did anything but yell for Jackson."

"I thought you were a Jackson man, sir?"

"So I am. I also try to be a Christian but I sometimes fall from grace and swear when I should be praying. To me Jackson stands for certain theories of government which I indorse. But as the leader he is not free from error. For instance, a man seeking a government position should have some qualification other than the fact that he shouted and voted for the winning ticket."

"That is just the point, Major. I am already looked upon as another one of the many woodsmen who have come to this city seeking office. Crockett said before I left home that all I would have to do to get a job would be to let out a few yells for Old Hickory."

"Crockett be damned!" Langstone exploded. "He talks more than any man I ever knew who knows so little."

Summers showed surprise. "But he is your friend, Major, and he merely said the same thing you have just said."

"Ahem! Damme, sir, you are a lawyer already! Let the position go hang. If you can hold out, I can. But job or no job, buckskin or broadcloth, I want you to go with me out to Carolin's to-morrow night. In fact, come to think about it I am rather glad you are going just as you are. I remember——"

"I have not said I was going," Summers reminded him.

"Ha! You can't fool me, my boy. I haven't forgotten

how you jumped at the chance to go riding with her that morning in Jackson and left Crockett and me to plan things you should have had a voice in. And when you came back you sat mooning like a sick calf, paying no attention to what Crockett and I had to say. The way you watched those stairs, waiting for her to come back down to dinner, made me think of a cat waiting for a mouse to come out of a hole in a grain bin."

"Well, she is—interesting," Summers said as though reticently making an admission.

"Um-m! 'Pon my word I believe that is the identical word she used in referring to you. Mind you, sir, she has more beaux than I have niggers—and it costs her more to feed them. I am her guardian, and I know. Sometimes I think they will eat her out of house and home. There is hardly a day when the house isn't overrun with young men who make a brave show at being *interested* in horses and fox hunting. Ha! She is the fox."

"Her parents are dead?" Will asked.

"Yes. Her mother died in childbirth. Her father, a Carolinian and friend of mine from boyhood, lost his life in a duel across the river on the Virginia side. A most unfortunate affair. Duelling, my boy, is a vicious, barbaric practice wherein two cowards meet."

Summers cleared his throat and became intensely interested in the rug patterns. The Major suddenly remembered.

"I do not mean to include you in such classification," he hastily amended.

"Why not? Am I not guilty of the offense?"

"Yes and no. You did not actually seek the man's life. It is plain as a pike staff that you sought only to prove him a rascally coward. That was no ordinary meeting. But in a duel where the code is followed, one man, a craven, seeks to salve an imagined wound in blood. The other man, however honorable, quails before the thought of what people may think. Confound what people think! What will his orphans think? I said the same to Adam that very morning we set out for the fatal spot, but he would not turn back."

"Perhaps he couldn't turn back," Summers offered. "Perhaps he had to test his courage."

"Stuff and nonsense! Courage needs no testing. Either it is present or it isn't, and the individual knows without putting it to any test."

"You were his second?" Summers asked.

"Yes. Friend of my boyhood, you know."

"I see. As a moral question, Major, did that make you party to the 'savage, barbaric practice'?"

"Harrump! Damme, what a lawyer I'll make out of you! I suppose it did. How could I escape?"

"How could *he*? But that is a quibble," he added quickly, seeing that the major was sore pressed. "Please go on with your story."

"Before the duel Adam charged me with the care of his two children, Carolin and Jefferson. She was about fifteen and Jeff was near seventeen. Adam left them well fixed, and I have done my best to watch over them. They live on the old place, about two miles out. Adam built the house and he spared nothing. They have wealth enough for Jeff to practice medicine without

any patients and for Carolin to entertain all the young men that can be crowded into the house. I'll warrant she has broken a hundred hearts. But mind you! She is no coquette. She doesn't have to be. By the eternal! she is pretty enough to set a man writing poetry and tearing his hair out trying to find words to rhyme with her name. Just now she is having the devil's own time trying to keep Jefferson from bundling up and traipsing off to Texas."

Summers looked up quickly. "Texas? He wants to go to Texas?"

"Yes, the fool. He says that no one here will trust his skill and that he will have to hang out his shingle in some new country where he isn't known. Fiddlesticks! Cows' horns are long at a distance. It seems that young men are always wanting to run off to some new country, but the women folks never want to go."

"She doesn't want him to go?"

"Carolyn? Of course not. Why should she want the young fool to go to that God-forsaken country and get his throat cut by some border ruffian? They have everything they want here. Jefferson's mind has been fired by the reports of a handsome, devil-may-care young man by the name of Gant who has been here twice in the past two years. Just who he represents I have not been able to discover, but I think he represents Mr Gant. He is in town now and never misses a chance to go to the Buells'. He is as crazy over Carolin as Crockett is about the deposits. Jefferson is doing his best to make it a match, thinking, I suppose, that it would carry them all off to Texas, niggers, baggage and all."

"Has Gant just come from Texas?" Summers asked, his eyes alight with a new interest.

"Yes. Only last week."

"Will he be at the Buells' to-morrow night?"

"You can lay to it. If Carolin doesn't ask him, Jefferson will."

"I will be glad to meet him. How does he dress, Major? As a frontiersman?"

"He dresses like a dratted fool! I'm glad you are going just as you are. By the powers I believe it was your dress that interested Carolin."

Summers colored. "Doubtless," he said. "Perhaps it would please her more if I carried a rifle and a hunting knife. Tell me, Major, how many Indians do you think it reasonable for me to have killed in the last six months?"

"Fix your own number, my boy. We are used to some tall tales here in Washington. But I will advise this: You had better look to your own scalp."

"Thank you, Major. I did not consider Miss Buell a—a huntress."

"Not at all, not at all!" the Major defended. "She is as fine a girl as ever lived. But," he chuckled quietly, "I will admit that a lot of game comes up and dies at her feet."

2

The following evening, when Summers climbed into the Major's carriage for the drive out to the Buell place, the aged negro on the box looked him over in undisguised

surprise and at once took on an air of wounded vanity and pride. He had driven the major for thirty years and in that time and service had carried many strange and notable guests. But this tall young man, who carried himself so proudly for one so strangely garbed, forced old Zeb to the conclusion that he had misunderstood the major's orders.

"Marse Jim," he said hesitantly as he tightened his reins, "did ole Zeb onderstan' you rightly 'bout us agwine ter Miss Ca'ylin's ter a—a pahty?"

"Yes. Drive on."

Dumfounded, old Zeb's toothless lower jaw worked up and down in wordless amazement. Sensing what lay back of the old negro's bewilderment, and enjoying the moment to its fullest, Summers leaned forward and said in all earnestness: "You see, Uncle, I am the entertainment."

Zeb brought his whip to salute, clucked to the sleek bays and swung out into the avenue.

The ride through the streets was annoying to Summers. Several friends, to whom the major lifted his hat, followed the carriage with curious eyes. Summers knew what was going through their minds. In this day of an ultra-democratic administration, buckskin and jeans were not unfamiliar sights upon the street. Since Jackson's election, social conventions had received a staggering slap in the face. Still and all, things were coming to a pretty pass when such a man as Major Langstone rode abroad at evening in company with an uncouth woodsman.

To Summers, the thought was both amusing and ir-

ritating. Brought up in a community where clothes had no speaking role in the comedy of convention, he had long considered them in the light of necessary physical impedimenta. But here they played a more important part. Here clothes became the voice of the prompter. Buffoon and wise man, the knight and the knave, the clean and the vile, all walked the stage in costumes cut from a single pattern.

It was irritating to think that he must bow to the convention or else give up the law and return to the woods. It was disturbing to have to think about appearance. An hour ago, when he had changed into his newest and best buckskin, he had felt faintly disturbed about appearance and convention. He had even taken the cloth suit from the hook and found himself in mental appraisement of it. At home he would have donned it without question, but here he felt it better to be in buckskin than in a homemade suit so obviously out of style. It would look comical; the buckskin was only strange. In such a situation there was but one choice, but that choice did not banish his misgivings.

Somehow, incongruously, that disturbed feeling had for a background a picture of a pair of laughing, brown eyes and dimpled cheeks whereon the satiny skin thinly veiled the flush of budding roses. The eyes, he remembered, had laughed a great deal. Perhaps they had never seen such garb as his. Well, he had never seen such garb as she wore that day when she rode Hard Cash, and certainly he had never seen a woman ride so well. Nor had he ever seen another such pair of brown eyes. He remembered that the picture had stayed in the back

of his mind while he was stupidly agreeing to the wild plan hatched out by Crockett and Major Langstone. Now, with mixed emotions, he was on his way to renew that acquaintance. He wanted to turn back and he wanted to go on.

It was not until they reached the Virginia shore and the full splendor of an Indian Summer evening came to them that he relaxed, forgot himself and drank deep of the mellow wine of an early autumn evening. The rolling hills were cloaked with the brilliant colors worn by Nature when she challenges Death. A quail piped liquid notes from a seared stubble; from a chimney just atop a low hill smoke rose like a giant stalk until it reached a heavier stratum of air and there spread out and drooped in belled festoons like a deep purpled morning glory wilted by the noon. Somewhere over in the valley a boy shouted to his dog and the echo was answered by the mellow tink-tonk of a distant cow bell.

"This reminds me of home," Summers said indolently, a touch of wistfulness in his voice.

The Major glanced at him shrewdly. "Homesick?" he asked.

"Of course. Who isn't—when autumn comes? Especially if you are away from people you understand—and who understand you."

"I thought your parents were dead."

"They are. But all my friends are there."

"Tut, tut! Not all. You have made friends here, and will make more. After you see Carolin to-night you will be singing a different tune."

"You forget that I have seen her."

"Not at all. Nor have I forgotten that this is the first invitation you have accepted to go anywhere. I wonder why?"

Again Summers' mind turned back to that morning ride in Jackson. Perhaps, after all . . .

The Major's chuckle brought him back.

"I beg pardon, sir?"

"I think you heard my remark, but I said, 'I wonder why?' "

Summers laughed frankly. "I suppose there is some significance in the act."

"Spoken like a man. But look sharp, Will. For wit she hasn't an equal among all the women in Washington—and I exclude the men from consideration. Men have no wit."

"No?"

"No. At least not natural, instinctive wit. They may do a great deal of profound thinking, and many do a great deal of talking, but wit—bah! To-night you will see a group of them hanging around her like so many flies at a dish of sorghum. And not a one of them with enough native intelligence to realize how foolish he is acting. But she will know, and all the while will be secretly wishing for some man to come along with enough backbone and independence to pay her not the slightest attention. I know women, my boy."

"Indeed? Then you have the advantage, Major. I have been told they are unfathomable."

"Fiddlesticks! An old saw. They are merely agile, like a fox, and never go where you would expect. I lived with one for thirty years and learned never to lay

any traps along an old run. If you want to catch a woman, never let her know you are setting traps. I caught my wife by carrying on a whirlwind courtship with another girl. Not one of these young simpletons courting Carolin has ever thought of that. They haven't the wit. I hope you will have the spunk and the backbone to—to——"

"Pay her not the slightest attention?" Summers completed. "But you have just told me that that was the way to catch a woman, and I am hard put to take care of myself. I think I had better appear interested."

"Humph!" the Major became explosive. "Just like all the rest. I thought maybe you were the one who could tame her."

"Tame her?"

"Yes, tame her. She keeps me on needles and pins. She is a fine girl, but like all the other girls in this generation. Good enough, fine minded, but—but, well, I don't know the word for it. Forward, I suppose, though that is a little strong. Now in my day a young woman was not supposed to——"

"Whose place is that?" Summers interrupted the Major's endless retelling of modes and manners in his day and pointed to a white pillared house set back from the road. Every window was gleaming with the light of candles or reflecting the flashing red and yellow rays of the setting sun.

"That's the Buells'. Pretty, isn't it?"

"Beautiful! No wonder she has suitors. No wonder she is gay. Look at the lawn, and the trees—and the soft lights under them."

"God help us!" the Major snorted. "This isn't even going to be fun. You are just another mooning young simpleton."

3

To be invited to the Buells' to dinner was both compliment and treat. Food, and the service thereof, were only the seasoning to the real feast. Here came gallant and dashing young army officers, somewhat sobered by the weight of their commissions; naval attaches, thirsting for duty and fretting under the restraint of city streets; scions of old families, who knew a great deal about horses, dogs and foxes, and something about classical poetry and women; men who brought tales of adventure from out the stormy west—all the youth and color of the capital came at the bidding of Carolin Buell or her brother Jefferson. With such a brilliant coterie of male guests there was no difficulty in securing a proper balance of feminine grace and beauty.

Summers had not been in the Buell home half an hour before he inwardly rebuked himself for thinking that he had been invited here because of an interest in his dress. These were gentle people, who took interest in personalities.

Among those he met was charming little Sally Ransome, whose blonde hair was hanging in shoulder length curls and whose blue eyes flashed with the light found in the eyes of one who is always a mental step or two ahead. She was a friend of Carolin's and always played the part of assistant hostess. She took charge of Summers at once, leading him from one introduction to an-

other. At the first opportunity Summers led her to one side and said:

"I have been wondering about your name, Miss Ransome. Are you, by any chance, of the Ransome family of old Williamsburg?"

"Why, yes, of course. My voice gives me away, doesn't it? Are my A's too broad?"

"It wasn't the voice so much as the name. My grandmother was a Ransome."

"Oh! Really?" Sally squealed with delight. "Then we are kin folks. I knew it the minute I saw you. You look so much like one of my uncles. Oh, Carolin!" she called. "Come over here just a minute, please. Did you know, dear, that Mr Summers' grandmother was a Ransome?"

Carolin put her arms around Sally and gave her a gentle squeeze. "No, I didn't know that, but I did know you could rake up a kinship of some fashion. Mr Summers, I want to warn you that Sally is remotely related to every man who has ever been invited to this house."

"But I didn't rake it up," Sally pouted. "And besides——"

"Give me credit for the discovery, Miss Buell," Summers said. "I may have the same weakness with which you charge Miss Ransome. Perhaps, after all, my grandmother's name was not Ransome."

"Oh, but it was!" Sally protested. "I knew it the moment I saw you—that is, I knew we must be kin folks."

"And the moment you saw Lieutenant Bell the other

night you knew he was kin," Carolin reminded, laughing, but her eyes sought battle.

"He is, too," Sally flared. "A fourth cousin—on my father's side."

"I grant it, Sally. But that was no reason why you should have taken him off to one side and kept him to yourself all the evening. I'm afraid Mr Summers will not get to meet any of the others now. And just think, I fell into the trap by seating you two—what is it Sally, cousins?—together at the table. I will have to go in and rearrange that."

"Please let it stand," Summers said. "I am sure I will fare well at the hands of a kinswoman."

"All right," Carolin said as she moved away, "but I warn you, Sally never lets anyone else enjoy her kin folks."

Sally made a laughing grimace of pique and tossed her blonde curls as she turned to Summers.

"Where did your grandmother come from, Mr Summers?"

"From Virginia. I don't know a great deal about her, but I do know that her name was Prudence and she married——"

"John Summers, of old Williamsburg," Sally completed, clapping her hands in an ecstasy of delight. "Father will be delighted! You must come over to our house right away—just as soon as you can. We have an old letter you must see and—and—*Well!* There is just too much to tell. And there is so much you can tell us. Don't you know about your grandfather, John Summers?"

Summers shook his head regretfully. "I'm afraid not as much as you know."

"You never heard of the way he left Virginia? That's too bad. It gives me a lump in the throat every time father tells about it! You see, he had a quarrel with an English officer and——"

"Sally!" Carolin called from the doorway leading to the dining room. "Won't you please bring Mr Summers in to supper? Even a cousin gets hungry."

Nearly all the guests had filed out of the room. Sally blushed as she said:

"I didn't hear the announcement—honestly, Carolin. Please forgive me, Cousin," she apologized to Summers. "I was so interested."

"So am I," Summers answered. "Will you finish telling me the story at the table?"

"No. If I do Carolin will accuse me of keeping you in a corner. If you are really interested, you will come to our house and see us—soon."

"At your invitation, Miss Ransome."

"Then I will send a carriage in for you next Friday evening about five o'clock. Will that be all right?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Sally!" Carolin was still standing at the door. She had learned from experience not to expect Sally Ransome to take any thought of food when an interesting male was at hand.

"Oh, well!" Sally said to Carolin as she passed through the door. "You always serve right in the middle of my conversation."

As Summers watched Carolin Buell preside at the

table he began to understand the Major's warning. Vivacious and full of charm, courteous in conversation yet rapier-like in her sallies, she was the epitome of all that a hostess should be. To Summers it was all so new, so utterly unlike any social life he had ever known, that for a few minutes he quite forgot the blonde-haired Sally Ransome and sat watching Carolin. It was a grave mistake to forget Sally Ransome.

"You find her interesting, don't you?" Sally asked, leaning forward until she somewhat obstructed his view of the head of the table. He could see that her eyes were seeking combat. "I was told you were quite indifferent to women," she challenged.

"Who told you that?"

"Is it true?" she countered.

"Why should it be?"

"You answer me with a question," she pouted.

"Just as you answered me. I asked you who told you that I am 'indifferent to women'?"

"Let me see . . . Why, I believe it was Carolin herself who told me." She glanced at him shrewdly.

"I see." Summers became interested in his plate. Then a moment later, "But I am interested in you, Miss Ransome—especially since I find we are kin."

Sally tossed her head defiantly. "My dear cousin! That is not a pretty speech. You are not supposed to tell a lady you are interested in her only because she is kin. I hear enough at home about the Ransomes. It's all one of my aunts can talk about."

"I am sorry if I have hurt your feelings. Aren't you proud of being a Ransome?"

"Proud? Yes, I suppose so. But I have never done a thing in my life."

"No? What were you supposed to do?"

"That's just it! You men—and especially the Ransomes—never expect a woman to do a thing but faint at the sight of a mouse and stay demurely at home while the men go out to conquer the world. We are shielded and protected on all sides. If we act human we are called——" she hesitated, seeking a word.

"Forward is the word the Major uses," Summers offered.

"That's just it. He is a dear old man, even though he thinks we are all headed for perdition just because we want to be human. Why, only yesterday I rode one of our colts, bareback, and my Aunt Patience Faith Hope Charity——"

"What's this?" Summers asked as Sally rattled off the names.

"That's her name. Funny, isn't it? But it fits her, exactly. She visits us six months out of every twelve and stays longer if we urge. She considers it her duty to watch over me. Yesterday, when she heard that I had ridden the colt bareback, she nearly had a nervous collapse. She vowed that my mother and grandmother both turned over in their graves. Why can't we do things like the men?"

"I never thought of it," Summers confessed. "What do you want to do?"

"Anything and everything. I would give ten years of my life for just one little adventure. Does that shock you?"

"Oh, no! So would I."

"You? But you have had so many. Hunting Indians and bears and——"

"Just a minute, please. Who told you all this?"

"Why, Carolin, of course. When she came back from Tennessee she told us all about you—and the country. It must be exciting to hunt Indians. How many have you killed, Mr Summers?"

"Many," Summers answered unsmilingly, yet inwardly amused at the popular conception of the wildness of his country. Then, in typical Abel Roundtree fashion, he embraced the situation. "In fact," he continued, "with the help of a friend I have practically driven them out of my county."

Sally studied his face. "I believe you are joking me. But they tell me you are Colonel Crockett's friend, and he is a great hunter. Do you hunt Indians together?"

"Separately. We make a game out of it. Who is the gentleman on Car—Miss Buell's right?"

"Didn't you meet him? Of course not. I was too busy talking family. He is a Mr Gant, from Texas. He was once an officer in the army. Sometimes he is called Captain and sometimes Major. I don't know his rank, but it is whispered that he comes here on some secret business from—from—what is that man's name down in Texas who is having so much trouble with the Mexican Government?"

"Austin?"

"Yes, that's the name. At any rate Mr Gant has made two or three trips here in the past three years and has formed quite a friendship with Jefferson. Major

Langstone just hates him. But," she added slyly, "Carolin likes him, there's no doubt about it." She watched his face for any sign that would betray the slightest jealousy.

"I would like to talk with Mr Gant," Summers said.

"Isn't he handsome, and—and dashing in appearance?" Sally enthused. "Do you dislike him?"

"Why should I?" he evaded.

"All the men do—except Jefferson. And all the women like him. He has such romantic stories to tell of Texas. When he talks about the soft, warm nights of Spring, and the music, and the flashing eyes of Spanish girls—well, it just makes all the ladies want to scratch out their eyes."

Summers laughed. "Do you?" he asked.

"Of course."

"You are honest and frank."

"Why shouldn't I be—with a cousin. Don't you know that no woman ever likes to hear a man talking about another woman's eyes?"

"I am afraid I didn't. What if she isn't interested in the man?"

"That isn't the point at all. It is his point of interest—the other woman's eyes—that irritates her."

"Oh! I see. You know, Miss Ransome, you can be a big help to me—if you will."

"To what purpose?" she countered.

Summers flushed, then laughed. "You are too quick," he said. Then, changing the subject, "I hope you will introduce me to Mr Gant. I would like to talk to him about Texas. I would be there myself to-night, but for chance."

"Are you sorry?" she asked, inviting compliment.

"Yes, in a way."

Sally laughed deliciously. "Indeed I can be of help to you, Cousin. You are entirely too frank. You were supposed to say you were glad chance brought you here. I'm sure Carolin would be pleased if you would take Mr Gant back to Texas and keep him there."

"I thought you said she liked him."

"Well . . . only because he spends a good deal of time over at our house and because she wants to keep him here in Washington. You see, she is worried for fear Jeff will go to Texas with him. Jeff is making a brave effort to practice medicine without any patients, and Mr Gant tells him there is a great future in Texas for doctors."

"There is a great future in Texas for anyone," Summers added.

"Do you think so?" Sally asked quickly. "Of course that is what Claude—er—Mr. Gant says. But it must be a rough, wild country. Too rough for a woman, don't you think?"

"What woman?" Summers challenged, looking directly at her. She flushed and, to hide her confusion, tried to laugh lightly.

"Oh, any woman," she replied. "Carolin, for instance. Jeff wants her to go there."

Summers did not make immediate answer. He made the mental guess that Sally Ransome had a personal reason for wondering about the social conditions in Texas. Had she not admitted that Gant spent a great deal of time at her house? And had she not just called

him Claude? And yet Major Langstone had said that Gant was crazy about Carolin.

Summers turned his eyes to the head of the table to study Gant's face. Yes, he was handsome, beyond denial, but there was a quality in his eyes and a weakness in his lips and chin which Summers disliked instinctively. At that moment he would have staked his right arm that Gant, whatever else he might be, was a skillful liar and philanderer.

"You don't like him, do you?" Sally said, seeming to read his mind.

"Did I say that?" Summers answered.

"No, but I can tell. Most men dislike him. With some it is jealousy, but I thought it would be different with you."

Before Summers could make reply he heard someone speak his name. He turned to face the lady on his left who, indignant over the fact that he had not addressed one word to her, said rather frigidly:

"Pardon me, but Miss Buell is trying to get your attention."

Summers looked up to find all eyes upon him. Carolin, sparkling with mischief, was laughing a little at his discomfiture.

"I hate to take your attention away from Sally Ransome," she said, "but she must share with us. We have a custom here, Mr Summers, which I will explain. But first let me tell you that whoever is invited here is among friends. Many of my guests are widely travelled, while Jefferson and I are stay-at-homes. So, for our adventure we require, or perhaps I had better say request, each

new guest to relate the most thrilling and dangerous experience of his life. If we like the story, that guest is voted a member of the household, with the privilege of coming here at any time without waiting for invitation. If the guest is too modest, or too untruthful for belief, then we put him on the list of 'occasional invitees.' It is now time for your story, Mr Summers."

Summers knew that his face was as flushed as an embarrassed schoolboy's. For the first time in his life he envied the careless, natural ease of those who were now watching him.

"Why, I—nothing exciting——" he was startled by the sound of his own voice. It seemed strangely unrelated to himself.

"Be careful," he heard Carolin prompting. "Remember, if you are too modest you may be voted out."

"Well," Summers began again, "I have been in some tight places, but my biggest adventure has been right here, to-night, escaping the deadfalls Miss Ransome put in front of me."

The room roared with laughter. Calls of "Vote him in," "Elect him a member," greatly enheartened him. He glanced at Sally. She was feigning petulance but was secretly glad that again, as always, she had been dragged into the limelight.

"A very adroit escape, Mr Summers," Carolin said, leaving the guests, and particularly Sally, to draw their own conclusions as to the precise application of her meaning. "The will of this gathering is evident. I welcome you as a member of the household, but confess disappointment. Knowing you to be a friend of Colonel

Crockett's and from Tennessee, I had expected a story worth the telling."

"I guess most of you here in the East look upon Tennessee as the backwoods," Summers answered. "You seem to forget that a man from Tennessee is in the White House to-night. Have you forgotten Houston, as brilliant a young Congressman as ever came to Washington?"

"Oh, no!" Jefferson Buell spoke up. "Houston doesn't let people forget him. When he had just about been forgotten by all he decided that thrashing Congressman Stanberry would be an excellent way to gain attention."

Summers managed to hold his temper. "Very well," he said. "And will any of you ever be allowed to forget Crockett?" He paused and smiled. "Not while Crockett lives. He has a way of coming back here. Facing the thing squarely, the citizens of my state, by our dress and perhaps by our manners, fortify you in your belief that we are border ruffians."

The group around the table stiffened noticeably, then leaned forward in eager expectancy. Here was a man with the courage to bring up the very subject in which they were all interested yet were too polite to mention. Summers saw that he had gained ground.

"Even Old Hickory himself violates many of your ideas of niceties in dress and customs," he went on. "Since coming here I have heard him referred to as 'the ruffian in the White House who entertains yokels and fills offices with fools.' You will recall that when Crockett first came here, dressed in buckskin, as I am, the titter of

your amusement could be heard clear back in Tennessee—where we are not supposed to hear anything.”

Carolyn had drawn herself a little more erect. Her face paled and her eyes evidenced distress.

“But Mr Summers,” she began limply, “there was nothing personal——”

“Of course not. You admit to an interest in my state. I am trying, in a blundering way, to defend it. You think of us as the borderland. As a matter of fact, Arkansas Territory and the land beyond the Mississippi is now the frontier. But not for long will they be the frontier. Thousands of splendid men are going to Texas—and still more will go. The eyes of this nation are on Texas. Even the President himself is between two fires—afraild to extend our boundaries and afraild not to do so. I tell you——” he broke off short with the sudden realization that he had allowed the fire of his old desire to be fanned to flame. “Excuse me,” he said. “For a long time I have wanted to go to Texas and I get somewhat excited about it.”

“Hurrah for you!” Jefferson Buell sang out. “Go on! You stop at the wrong place. For the last two years I have been trying to tell Carolyn that it is a land of wonderful opportunity, but she——”

“Jefferson!” Carolyn spoke just the one word, but there was a wealth of rebuke in it. Jefferson gulped audibly and subsided. There could be no question who was manager of this household.

Seemingly at a set signal, Carolyn arose, and all the ladies with her.

“We will leave you gentlemen for a little while to

enjoy your cigars and to settle the West," she said. "But don't journey too far. The music will begin in a little while and I, for one, would rather dance than go to Texas—even if the 'eyes of the nation' are turned there."

"You desolate us," Gant told her with a bow. "I, for one, find smoking a stupid substitute for the enchantment of the ladies."

"A pretty speech, Mr Gant," Carolin said.

"But none the less true."

As the cigars were being passed by a negro house boy, Gant, gracefully overlooking the fact that Carolin had failed to introduce him to Summers, turned and said:

"You spoke of having long wanted to go to Texas, Mr Summers. If not too personal a question, may I ask why you have not gone?"

"A whim of circumstance, sir."

"Ah! She is mistress of us all. But I hope Fate will throw more men in our direction."

"She will," Summers replied with grave earnestness. "Do you come from Austin's colony, Mr Gant?"

"Why—er, yes and no. I have visited in his colony, but I hold no land there. I am not engaged in farming."

"Did you come overland?"

"Oh, no! From Velasco, by boat. It is safer."

"I see. Is the land good in Austin's grant?"

"Excellent. Of course it is spotted, but excellent in the main."

"I hear rumors that his titles are no good; that hundreds of families have turned back, disgusted."

"That's true in part. If you are interested, Mr Summers, I will be glad to go into the matter in detail—in private. Perhaps these other gentlemen are not so interested."

"Oh, yes, go on!" Jefferson spoke up.

"Who is not interested," said another, "except Jackson? He blows hot and cold."

"Even Jackson is interested," Gant said with a knowing look, "but he has a hornet's nest in the Nullificationists. I happen to know that he tried to purchase Texas outright. Clay heard of it and at once began muddying the water. Ever since the collapse of Burr's dream every public man has been afraid to whisper 'Texas.' The hour is not yet ripe, but it will come."

"You mean—armed interference?" Major Langstone asked, pointedly.

"Assuredly."

"Nonsense! Stuff and nonsense! We have no business interfering. When an American leaves this country to take up land under another government, he must look to that government for the protection of his rights. If that government is not just, then that citizen has only one recourse—the strength of his own arms. He must not look to the country of his birth for protection."

"I am afraid you do not understand the situation," Gant responded. "There is a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding down there, but out of it all will come one thing."

"Huh! What?" grunted Major Langstone, irritated by Gant's dramatic pause.

"Revolution—war—independence."

"That's three things," the Major scoffed.

"And one thing more," Gant added. "American intervention—when the time is ripe. From the Atlantic to the Pacific, Major, all a part of the United States—or else a great new empire."

The Major, now full of choler, shook a trembling finger at Gant.

"Young man, you talk treason to your adopted country! As a citizen of Mexico, you talk treason!"

"Then 'make the most of it'," Gant quoted lightly. "I only voice what Mexico fears. I know something about adventurous Americans, Major. Where they go the flag will follow. That will be from coast to coast. By war, by purchase, or by settlement—all America. Thomas Jefferson effected the Louisiana Purchase, and God knows there were many to oppose him. Jackson is eager to put a like feather in his cap, but he is tied hand and foot. His fight against the Bank and Nullification has left him little time to look outside the doors of his own house, and when he does look out it is only to discover Clay and Calhoun yapping on his trail like mongrel curs and——"

A chorus of protest interrupted him.

"He is right about that, at least," the Major reluctantly agreed.

"Indeed I am," Gant continued, "and Jackson will lick all of his enemies before he is through. Meanwhile, the colonists are increasing in Texas. Powder is scattered all over Texas. Some day a spark will fly, and then Jackson will come marching in."

Major Langstone grew red to the point of explosion.

Jefferson Buell, recognizing the sign, put his own neck in the noose.

"You don't understand, Major. Texas, you see, is a——"

"Jefferson," the Major turned upon him sharply. "I understand things you never dreamed of. And I understand better than you know that should Mr Gant's seditious utterances come to the ear of the Mexican government I wouldn't give a bawbee for his life. Unless, of course," he turned to face Gant squarely, "unless, as I have heard it rumored, his object is to foment trouble and he is actually in the employ——"

Gant was on his feet, his dark face paled with anger.

"Sir! Do you mean to infer——"

At that moment Carolin came to the wide double door. "Gentlemen," she called, "are you ready for dancing or is Texas still being settled?"

Gant was both actor and courtier. "You come at a most opportune moment," he said, hiding his anger behind a flashing smile. "The Major was just hinting that he was eager for—for action."

"Not eager," prompted the Major, entering into the game of veiling words, "but what *you* may consider willing, Mr Gant."

4

Summers knew nothing about dancing and Major Langstone was too wrothy to get any pleasure out of looking on. Pleading weariness and an early appoint-

ment the next morning, the Major made ready for the drive back into town. Carolin was disappointed but she knew the Major too well to offer protest.

"I am sorry you do not dance, Mr Summers," she said as they stood at the door. "Especially for Sally's sake." She slipped one arm around Major Langstone and gave him a squeeze. "This dear old bear pleads his age, but that excuse will not do for you. You must learn. It is quite easy."

"So it seems—when I watch you, Miss Buell. But I lack grace."

"Not with your tongue, Mr Summers. Remember, you are now a member of the household and we shall expect you often. I am sure Sally will teach you to dance."

"Yes, she has offered her services."

"Splendid! Of course you accepted?"

"Not exactly, but she doesn't know that. You see, I had already gone so far as to select my teacher."

"Indeed! And who is it?"

"Yourself, Miss Buell. I will need instruction from the best."

Under the soft glow of candle light streaming through the door, he saw that she blushed bewitchingly.

"You men!" she said. "But I will take you at your word. The lessons will begin upon your next visit. Major, are you dreadfully angry about something I have said or done? You always give me just a little kiss."

Major Langstone mumbled excuses and kissed her with fatherly affection. "Good-night, Carolin. Don't let these young rascals dance here until daylight."

"You old dear! You know I always make them stop—a little before daylight."

5

Major Langstone was a man of moods. When he wanted to talk he talked a great deal, but when anger was upon him, or the weight of some legal problem, his thoughts were as inviolate as the stars and he withdrew inside a hedge of silence as impregnable as the barriers of virtue.

As old Zeb held the bays to a quick trot along the winding, moonlit road, Summers sensed that the Major was in no mood for conversation. Glad of this, he adjusted himself comfortably in his corner of the seat and gave himself wholly to the patternless, illogical march of thoughts. Spectre-like and thin as the fabric of dreams, those thoughts took formless form in the subconscious mind and, drugging consciousness, stormed and held the citadel of the mind.

The inexplicable, fathomless events of the past six months paraded before him in thoughts and forms eluding capture or analysis. To-night this same moon was looking down on the prairie lands of Texas; prairie lands whose fever he had felt, whose call he had heard. There men were working out with eager toil the problems they had willingly shouldered. They were men who had laid circumstance by the heels and had gone where they wanted to go. They were men, by the eternal! not just creatures of the winds of chance. Fancy any one of them bowing to the will of circumstance or following

some strange trail because a woman smiled and beckoned at the end . . .

Something was beating diapasons of rhythmic time. Oh, yes . . . the horses on the stone road. But it was rhythmic, and the iron shod wheels now and then screeched like an abused fiddle. Then better music came flowing from an unseen fiddler and the steady beat of feet marking time. . . .

Summers watched a girl in a flowered dress move fairy-like before his eyes. A man no less graceful danced with her and spoke words that came as easily as words come to one who makes a dream speech. And the man dancing with her was Summers himself—in broadcloth and fawn colored trousers. Umm! Perhaps, after all, buckskin was only the affectation of a man who would not surrender because he resented the superior things he had never possessed. . . Abel Round-tree materialized in a hazy way and said, knowingly, "Summers is too daggone sot in his way to ever give in to a woman."

Then the dancers faded and four men stood before a tree, searching for a rifle ball which Abel had in his pocket. Ah, that was the point that marked the fork in the road—when he had backed skill against fate in that one shot with Crockett. . . . No, further back than that. He had become a puppet of circumstances on that day when he chose Abel as his second in the duel—Abel, whose clownish sense of humor caused him to give his principal an empty gun and load the dice of Fate. . . No, it was beyond that. The quarrel with Crenshaw, perhaps. . .

What a strange thing was the pathway of life. Every decision, every move, marked a new fork in the road. Many times both ways were inviting. Only one could be followed. But what lay down that other road? Was it forever closed? Was it possible to turn back? . . . Was there such a thing as free will and choice?

No! He was but a bobbin in the shuttle of some giant force that wove fantastic patterns with the slender threads of men's lives. Men's lives for threads . . . fragile material . . . yet what a mighty pattern had been woven from the dawn of time. And the weaving would go on into infinity. Did the shuttle ever break a thread before its uses were complete? . . . Were there clumsy patches on the fabric . . . was the pattern patternless?

What a mighty jester was the Weaver! He must have laughed when he brought the threads of the life of a girl of culture and wealth across the pathway of a woodsman clad in buckskin. . . Ha! Summers laughed to himself. Blind weaver. . . Aimless fool! Make a pattern of that, if you can!

"You heard what Gant said?" Major Langstone's crisp voice shook Summers back into his conscious self.

"Why—yes, sir. You mean about Texas?"

"Blast Texas! I mean what he said to me at the table just before Carolin came to the door."

"Oh, that! You needn't worry about that, Major. He was just making a feeble effort to defend his dignity."

Major Langstone glanced at Summers quickly. "You don't like him, then?"

"No."

The Major chuckled. "You wouldn't."

"Why do you say that?"

"It is a logical deduction, my boy. Didn't you envy his position at Carolin's right—just a little?"

"I thought I was too busy with Miss Ransome to have any time for envy."

"Bosh! Envy takes no time nor nursing. That arrangement at the table to-night was Carolin's first move in the game. I think she was out-maneuvered when Sally dug up that kinship business. Is there anything in it?"

"I think so. It's true that my grandmother was a Ransome and married a John Summers. Miss Ransome seemed to know all about it. She has asked me to visit their home next week."

"Umni! That's Sally, all over. Never loses any time. When you see two women making funny moves it is time to take for the timber. Be careful, Will."

"I?"

"Yes, you! You are like all the others—just clay. Do you think I didn't notice you there in the doorway to-night? Humph! Looking like a sick calf and making pretty speeches."

"Well—I'll admit it isn't hard to say nice things to her."

"Um-m!" Major Langstone laid a hand on Will's knee, gripping it slightly. "You're right, Will. It isn't hard for men to hang around Carolin. After all these years I have come to look upon her as my own flesh and blood. And she is a problem. Jefferson is a fine boy, ambitious and willing to work, but Carolin is a Buell. She likes fine things and she gets

them, without the slightest thought or worry about the cost. In a few more years her share of the estate will be all gone—if she keeps up at the clip she is going. Jeff knows it as well as I, and like a pair of fools we keep it from her. See how she handles us? We spare her. Jeff would rather she would have it all than say anything to hurt her. You can't talk disaster to a singing bird. She would just keep on singing."

The Major stopped for a moment. Surprised at the confidence, Summers found no words suited to reply.

"Maybe that is why I get so hot under the collar when I see men like Gant hanging around," the Major went on. "They are all young men—untried. They appear gallant enough to her eyes, but by Gad, sir! it gives me the creeps to see a man trying to cage a bird. And Gant of all men."

"Why are you so opposed to Gant?"

"He is a rascal! Mark my word. I wouldn't trust him as far as I can throw a bull calf by the tail. If he isn't a coward he will come into my office and demand an explanation of my remarks to-night. But he won't. B' Gad! I'd get a great deal of pleasure out of shooting him."

"I thought you were opposed to duelling, Major."

"Fiddlesticks! That doesn't keep me from enjoying getting angry enough to fight, does it? On each occasion when Gant leaves for Texas I pray devoutly that he will never come back. But a coward and a skunk——"

"I doubt if he is a coward, Major. Life in the border country isn't very healthy for cowards."

"Stuff and nonsense! They are scapegraces, misfits

and adventurers, or men who lacked the ability to stay at home and win out."

"That's putting it pretty strong, sir."

"Yes, but true. Look at your man, Sam Houston. I knew him well when he was here in Congress. He was in my home many times. Brilliant? Yes. He sparkled. But when he made a mess of his life, did he begin again where he had failed? No. He disappeared and when next heard of was living with the Cherokees out in Arkansas."

Summers felt his ears growing hot and welcomed the twinkling lights that marked the houses at the edge of the city. He hesitated to antagonize further the already overwrought old man, though he knew that the Major's statement concerning Houston, based on a popular report, was but a half truth.

Silence could not hold Summers long. "Won't you give the man credit for his gallantry?" he asked at last.

"Gallantry? For living with the Indians?"

"Major, I know more of that unfortunate affair than you do. You admit he was brilliant. So he was. Unmarried, he became a political power in our state and unmarried he became governor of that state. He was fair prey for all ambitious mothers with marriageable daughters. Such a fate overtook him. It was not long until he discovered that the woman who bore his name could never give him her heart. It belonged to another. Noised about, this would become scandal. He did the only thing a man can do who truly loves a woman—he spared her. He gave up his office as governor and disappeared into the wilderness. Such gallantry is pos-

sible only with a man who is bigger than ambition. Bear the burden and spare the woman. By the way, I seem to recall hearing you say something about sparing Miss Buell. Doubtless you can understand."

"Harrump!" The Major cleared his throat and blew his nose with great vigor. "I apologize, sir, to you and to him. Zeb! You black rascal, are you asleep? You missed the turn, there. Do you expect Mr Summers to walk home?"



Chapter Two

THE RANSOMES

I

THE following afternoon Jefferson Buell called at the office to see Major Langstone on a matter of business. The Major was out, so he sat down to talk with Summers. "Like the law?" he asked.

"Yes, in a way. Sometimes I wonder what leads me to believe I can ever master it. Look at those books," he pointed to a long shelf. "Most of them covered with dust and I think some of them have never been off the shelf since they were placed there. Back in my county a row of books like that would make the owner a great lawyer; here they only serve to discourage me."

"You have a great chance here," Jefferson told him. "The Major is getting old and he likes you. He tried to persuade me to study law but I wanted to be a doctor. Well, I am a doctor and no one would let me attend a sick cat. If I know anything about medicine I never get a chance to prove it. 'Oh, young Buell,' the people say, 'Adam Buell's boy. A doctor, eh? Oh, yes, we know *him*. But he can't be much of a doctor. Why, we have known him ever since he was a boy. We always have old Doctor Small'."

Summers laughed at Jeff's mimicry. "You should grow a beard," he advised, "and try to look older."

"I suppose so. Whiskers are like law books to a

great many people. Recently a slave over at the Ransomes took violently ill. In haste they sent for me. When I got there the old wench was rolling in misery. But do you think she would take what I offered? No, sir! She waited until an ignorant old slave came in from the field to give her some evil smelling stuff he had concocted from roots, bark, leaves and the Lord knows what. She took it with sublime confidence, and I'm damned if it didn't fix her up! Since then Sally has been making my life miserable."

"That's one of her favorite pastimes, isn't it?" Summers asked. "She kept me on coals the other night, and I'm afraid of what she will do to me next Friday night. She is sending a carriage after me. You see, my grandmother was——"

"A Ransome," Jeff completed, "and that makes you kin. I know all about it. Depend on Sally to tell me. She can rake up kinship with more people than anyone else in the world."

"Then you don't like her?"

"Like her? Lord, man! I am silly about her. What a chase I have given that girl. Oh, there's no secret about it!" he added, noting the surprised look on Summers' face. "We have been neighbors all our lives—grew up together. Their place joins ours, you know. When we were children, playing together, I used to marry her nearly every day. Carolin would be her maid of honor and a little nigger house boy would act as the preacher. He knew by heart the ten commandments and the Lord's Prayer, and by a combination of the two worked up quite an effective marriage ceremony. One

day a neighbor boy dropped in just after the ceremony and I suggested that he marry Carolin. He was willing and so was Carolin, but Sally decided she would marry him. I pointed out that she had just acquired one husband, but that didn't daunt Sally. She appealed to the nigger and he discovered he had left out one of the commandments and that the marriage, therefore, was not binding. Sally promptly married the other boy and Carolin went home in tears. From that day to this they have played a shrewd game. Lord! I'll wager I have proposed to that girl a thousand times, but she only laughs at me and says something to make me mad."

"I did not know you were in love with her," Summers said, then wondered if he should have said something else, or nothing at all.

"You didn't? Then you're the only man in Washington who doesn't know all about it. I guess it's a case of my being too much like home folks. Sometimes I think she really cares and then she begins making eyes at someone else. Just now it is Gant."

"Gant?"

"Yes. That's why you were seated with her at the table the other night. Carolin is a Jim-dandy. She really wanted to have you with her at the head of the table but she helped me out instead."

Stupidity was written all over Summers' face. Jefferson realized that he was talking in riddles.

"You don't know much about women, do you?" he asked.

"I am afraid not," Summers admitted.

"Neither do I, but Carolin does and she comes to my

rescue. Just now she is working on something that is too deep for me. I begged her not to pay any attention to Gant—to let Sally be with him just as much as she wants. I know how to cure Sally. But Carolin said, ‘Don’t be stupid, Jeff. If I show an interest in Gant, and then turn him down cold, Sally wouldn’t touch him with gloves.’ See how it works? Carolin is giving Gant a chance to propose to her in order to help me out with Sally.”

“Oh . . . I see,” Summers said, a note of surprised bewilderment in his voice.

“That’s nothing,” Jefferson reassured him. “Nearly all the men propose to Carolin at some time or another. But I am afraid this plan isn’t going to work. Gant has been at the Ransome’s nearly every day since he came here this trip. He leaves next week, he tells me, and I am mighty glad of it.”

“I thought he was your friend?”

“Yes, I suppose he is,” Jefferson said with a forced yawn that served poorly to cover his real feelings. “I can’t get angry at a man for thinking Sally pretty.” He arose and offered his hand. “I am glad to have seen you again. Come out and see us soon. Please tell Major Langstone that I called.”

As Jefferson reached the door Summers called to him. “Are you busy, Dr Buell?” he asked.

“Busy? Never! Why?”

“Well—I want to get some new clothes and I don’t know where to begin. I was wondering if you would go with me and help make the selections.”

“You bet I will! With pleasure. But man! You are not giving up the—the buckskin?”

"Yes. Major Langstone thinks they do not become a lawyer, and I agree. They pass muster in Tennessee but they won't do here."

"When do you want to go?"

"Whenever you have time."

"I always have time. I am sorry to see you make the change, though. From now on you'll look just like the rest of us. Why, man, your clothes set you apart."

"I am afraid it *is* my clothes."

Jefferson saw his blunder. "I did not mean that, exactly," he said. "I meant that they give you individuality. All the rest of us are like peas in a pod. But you—everybody in town knows about you."

"I want everybody in town to forget about me. Even my landlady thought I must be holding some government office. She was sure of it when she learned I am a Jackson man. There is an old saying that 'Clothes do not make the man,' but they can make the man very uncomfortable."

"They surely can," Jefferson laughed. "Just wait until you get on one of these tight waistcoats and a high collar and stock like these Carolin makes me wear. Then you'll know just how uncomfortable they can make the man. If you want to find out, get your hat and come along. There's a German tailor over on Pennsylvania Avenue who makes all my clothes. He's slow, but he does good work. Are you in a hurry to get them?"

"I haven't been—but I am now. I hate to go out to the Ransomes' dressed like this. The family might not be very proud of their new-found relation. Can the tailor make them by that time?"

Jefferson laughed in great glee. "I'll make him do it. Whew! but this will be a disappointment to Sally! She has told a hundred lies about you already. I think they expect you to arrive with scalps around your waist."

2

The little German tailor over on the Avenue made good on his promise to Summers to deliver a suit on Friday. A woodsman coming to town and wanting clothes in a hurry was nothing new in the life of this tailor. Furthermore, he had been in this land of promise only five short years and was quite willing to work far into the night in order to collect on the promise.

Twice during the week Summers had gone in for fittings and on each occasion protested the tightness of the fawn colored trousers and dark flowered waistcoat. But the tailor was adamant. He gave Summers to understand that a German tailor, apprenticed in youth to the best suit maker in all Heidelberg, needed neither advice nor direction from a man who was making his first change from buckskin to broadcloth.

At four o'clock, Friday, Summers called for the suit and then hurried to his room with the eager haste of a boy who had just received a pair of copper-bound boots. He dressed with great care, and no little pains. The high collar and stock were particularly rebellious and baffling. When at last they were conquered he backed away to survey himself in a gilded panel mirror just large enough to present a full view when he stood across the length of the room.

The tailor had done a good job; there could be no doubt of that. And Jefferson was right about the tight trousers, waistcoat and stock making a man uncomfortable. Summers felt that his neck was held in a clamp. He noted that his chin, in an effort to find some comfort, was tilted upward at the same arrogant angle which he had thought an affectation in others. Now he knew that torment, nobly and silently endured, may lend the victim an air of superiority. After all, clothes at least made some outward changes in the man.

Next he tried on the beaver hat which Jefferson had selected. It added so many inches to his height that he wondered if he had not failed to accomplish his aim. He was seeking relief from curious, staring eyes by hiding under the clothes customs of the day, only to discover that those clothes served to accentuate his height and rugged frame. Now he was a giant indeed. And those blasted trousers! Surely the seams must inevitably give way under the stress of intractable muscles. He tried sitting down, backing gingerly into a chair. Ah! There was a thing wanting practice!

Satisfied at last, he removed coat, collar, stock and waistcoat and began shaving. He had been in much too great a hurry to shave first. As the heavy-bladed old razor grated and hissed through his beard he began humming a song. There was a carefree quality in his voice. He noted it, and thought, vaguely, that clothes also had some effect upon the inner man. He lifted his razor and laughed. Wouldn't Crockett be surprised when he reached Washington and saw the transformation? Wouldn't Abel Roundtree strut with pride if he could see his friend

in such a turnout as this? And (hopefully) Carolin would be

In a rich baritone he again took up his song.

*"In the green Spring-tide, all tender and bright,
When the sun sheds a kindlier gleam . . ."*

3

The Ransome home lay a mile beyond the Buells' and on somewhat higher ground. The house was a large, T-shaped two-story red brick with a carriage porch straddling a drive that wound up the hill from the pike below. It was more pretentious than the Buell home but less hospitable in appearance. The front of the house was unbroken save by the carriage porch resting on its large pillars. The windows, too small for so great an expanse of front, caused the house to brood moodily over the expanse of verdant, friendly acres. That house, Summers thought as he approached in the carriage, had been built by a dominant man. Something of his character was in it. He was a man of pride and had fashioned stern walls to beat back intrusion.

Sally was waiting at the door when the carriage drove under the porch. Her cry of amazed surprise proved Jefferson's prophecy that she would be disappointed when she saw her kinsman arriving in broadcloth.

"Why, Mr Summers!" she exclaimed as Will lifted his hat and stepped from the carriage. "I wouldn't have known you!"

"Does a change of clothing also change relationship?"

he asked. "Last week at the Buells' I was 'Cousin.' Now I am Mr Summers. I was afraid your family might not approve of me in buckskin."

"Why, Cousin—Cousin——"

"Will," Summers prompted.

"Why, Cousin Will! You wrong us. A Ransome is a Ransome, however dressed. But do come in. Father is out about the place and is late, as usual. Some negro has a new baby or a new hound, I'll warrant. But Aunt Patience is waiting."

"You mean Aunt Patience Hope Faith and Charity?"

"Not '*and*'," Sally corrected. "It makes her furious when someone includes the '*and*'. She has been a little skeptical about you. You see, she knew your grandfather, John Summers, and can remember all about his wedding with Prudence Ransome."

"How old is she?"

"Goodness! Don't ask *her* that! She isn't old at all, to hear her tell it. But she is eighty-one, just the same. And please try to remember just a little more about—about your family history."

"But I don't know much. I have been hoping to learn more from you."

"Not from me, but from Aunt Patience. She is the family historian and does all the talking. When Father and I try to tell anything about it we always get something mixed up or marry someone off to the wrong person. But Aunt Patience, she *knows*. Oh, dear!" she sighed. "I get so tired hearing about it. I wish I had been born a nobody."

"I have heard it argued that everyone is."

"Treason!" Sally warned as they passed through the wide hall. "For goodness sake don't let Aunt Patience hear you say that!"

Aunt Patience sat in the exact center of the great living room, waiting and ready to pass judgment upon people and things. In point of years she was an old, old lady, but nature never fashioned her to sit knitting in a corner. Glinting silver hair lay smoothed back under a little black lace cap. Her face was wrinkled into folds; her hands, resting on a staff, were as fleshless as talons. But she held herself erect, defying age. Patience Ransome was not one to sink deep into a chair and fold her hands in submissive abdication. Death would never find her waiting and resigned. It must overtake and conquer her. Her eyes, though dimmed by age, still flashed challenge.

As Sally made the introduction the old lady stiffened perceptibly. Actually she wanted to lean forward, the better to see, but she would show those old eyes a thing or two. She would have no one think her a doddering old woman peering out from lack-luster eyes. The glasses in her black knitted bag were for reading only—and that when no strangers were near. Besides, this tall young man, so elegantly dressed, was a Ransome. She had eyes enough for that.

She held out her hand. That would draw him nearer and save an embarrassing confession of weakness. Summers sensed that here was a place for little gallantries in which he was not schooled. He bowed low over her hand, and Patience Ransome's old eyes flashed approval.

"Young man," (her high, thin voice was a rebellious

thing which she could not master) "you are the spitten image of John Summers. I hope you are not as high-tempered."

"I can't answer that," Summers replied, "but some of my friends charge me with being hard-headed."

"You would be, if you are a Summers. Oh, I knew them all! I never could understand why Prudence Ransome married——"

"Now, Auntie!" Sally remonstrated. "Remember that——"

"I remember perfectly," the old lady snapped. "Do you recall your grandfather, young man?"

"No, I never saw him. I heard my parents speak of him a number of times, but my father died when I was about fifteen and my mother followed him three years later."

"Too bad, too bad! You should have known your grandfather and grandmother—especially your grandmother. Who was your mother, young man?"

"She was a Clay."

Aunt Patience sniffed suspiciously. "That might mean anything," she declared. "Some were good people and some were not such-a-much. It is all right if she was one of the Virginia Clays. Now the Ransomes were——"

Summers was spared a long tribute to the Ransome family by the timely arrival of Sally's father.

Samuel Ransome was a powerfully built, red-bearded man who needed no strength from ancestors. He walked in his own right and might. He had but two great weaknesses—his dogs and his daughter, Sally. He ruled all in his household save Sally and Aunt Patience. Which

is to say that he ruled the negroes and his dogs. In Sally's hands he was as pliant as a willow and under her directions had welcomed many kinsmen whom she had discovered.

His booming voice beat down Aunt Patience's thin-voiced recital of the Ransome virtues.

"You are welcome here, Mr Ransome," he said, giving Summers a handshake that was full of strength.

"Summers, not Ransome," Sally prompted.

"Tut, tut! Didn't you say he was a grandson of Prudence Ransome? A Ransome may lose the name by marriage, but not the right to it, nor the blood."

"I was just telling him about the Ransomes," Aunt Patience seized the opening.

"Please wait until after supper," Sally broke in. "Everything will be getting cold. What kept you so long, Father? I asked you to come in early."

"Well——" he hesitated, running his fingers through his full, rich beard. His eyes held a guilty light. "Well, I came back through the bottom and that black rascal Abner had two young pups out on trail with old Trace and Bertha. I had to stop and listen, didn't I? Do you like fox hunting, Mr Ran—Summers?"

"I would, I'm sure. You see, out in my country we hunt for the hide, not the pleasure. But I like dogs and horses better than anything else."

"Oh, come now! You forget the ladies. Women, dogs and horses, my boy."

Summers flushed guiltily and glanced at Sally. "I do not understand women," he said.

"Ha! That's why they rank first. However, if you

understand dogs, you must come out and hunt with me. I've a nigger who is the best dog handler in Christendom. These beaux Sally brings out here would rather sit around the house and wait for food than listen to the sweetest music in the world. Why, would you believe it, sir, only last week one of those young popinjays was out here and old Trace picked up a trail down in the bottom and——"

"Father! Please!" Sally took hold of his arm, turned him around and gave him a gentle shove toward the dining room. Aunt Patience had already started. She needed a little more time to make the journey, but she neither needed nor wanted the arm of any man. She had come a long way in the world, alone, and it was too late now to confess any weakness. Her staff, ringing against the floor, had a sound of defiance.

As they entered the dining room Sally turned to Summers and whispered: "Between Father and Aunt Patience you won't hear much except stories of the Ransomes and of dogs. I hope you won't mind."

Sally was right. Samuel Ransome had a great deal to say about hounds, and Aunt Patience tried to work in a great deal about the Ransomes. Between the two cross fires Summers picked up two outstanding facts: The Ransomes were a very fine people, dating back to the earliest settlement in Virginia, and the present breed of Ransome hounds were equally rich in blood and quality.

At last Sally took matters in her own hands and directed the conversation away from dogs and family. Her father hated to surrender, but he knew better than to oppose Sally. Aunt Patience was willing, for she knew

that any conversation, except one dealing with dogs, must inevitably lead back to the Ransomes.

So it did. Sally mentioned something about Major Langstone which served to remind Aunt Patience that the Major had recently visited her to get an affidavit in the matter of an estate having to do with a piece of land owned by a man named Price who had married a girl named Bryant who was a fourth cousin of the Ransomes on the maternal side of the house. There! That brought the conversation back to a matter of some consequence.

"Has Sally told you about the old letter we have which was written by your grandfather on the day of his marriage?" Aunt Patience asked Summers.

"Yes, indeed! She promised to let me see it."

"I have it here," Aunt Patience announced, fishing around in the large knitted black bag which she habitually carried. At last she drew out an old letter, wrinkled and yellowed with age.

"This letter," she held it up as though it were of spun glass, "was written by John Summers, to his brother, on the day of his wedding to my cousin, Prudence Ransome. It finally came into the hands of our family. When he wrote this letter, he knew he was going to fight a duel with Captain Roup, a British officer whom I remember quite well. And Prudence knew it, too, but she never said a word, mind you, not a word! I can see her now, just as she was the night of the wedding. The way she walked into the room you would never have guessed she knew that by the following night she might be a widow. I tell you the Ransomes——"

"Do let Cousin Will read the letter," Sally interrupted,

knowing that Aunt Patience was off on another footnote of family praise. She took the letter from her aunt's hand and passed it to Summers.

Summers unfolded it with great care. The ink was fading, but there was a boldness to the hand that made it legible after all these years. Sally moved one of the candles nearer.

"Read it aloud," she urged. "I always love to hear it. It makes me sort of—well, makes me sort of wish I had been Prudence Ransome, instead of just Sally Ransome. I'm afraid no one will ever fight a duel over me."

"Humph!" said her father.

Summers, failing to realize that here was a case where he should offer a distressed lady some chivalrous reassurances, began the reading of the letter:

"*My dear Brother Charles:*

This letter, entrusted to a servant, will reach your hands after I have met Captain Roup on the field of honor. You will then know the result, but you will not know all that has led to that meeting. You must believe that my provocation is great indeed, else I would not hazard so much. I would be wanting in devotion and love should I repeat or here make of record the venomous lie spoken by my unscrupulous adversary. I must hope, therefore, that you will temper all criticisms of my action with the pledge of my word that I could not, in honor, follow any other course.

If it be my fate to fall at the hands of this British officer, I will not be the last. Rebellion is upon us. Men of your mind, and sense of justice, cannot much longer be held in bondage. If I escape his fire, and he falls,

then I must flee to the wilderness with my bride, there to start anew in a new land, where, however great our labors and hardships, we will at least escape the yoke and tyranny of our oppressors. It may be that I go to oblivion, but I go with honor.

The purpose of this letter is not to set up any defense for my actions, but to place upon you a charge which your love for me will cause you to execute to the fullest extent of your capabilities. This knowledge gives me strength.

If I fall in to-morrow's encounter, my wife, widowed a short twelve hours after her marriage, will return to her father's house. There, when all is known, she will be comforted and my act vindicated. I charge you with the settlement of our joint estate, which is not great, and with the responsibility of guarding her interests as I would guard them. You will care for her in want, should want come; you will comfort her, and offer hope. Through all the years, however long, and through health and sickness, joy or sorrow, you will do for her, through your love for me, all that I would do for her.

And now, my dear brother, I again give you reassurance of my love for you. Prudence knows all, and is facing it with a rare courage. For some reason, beyond the compass of my vision, the Fates have entered to disturb our planned course and shape our destinies. My richest recompense is in the thought that, whatever the outcome, I have chosen a wife of courage. Man has no greater fortune.

Believe me, I am, affectionately yours,

John.' "

Sally gave a delighted little squeal. "Isn't that last the loveliest part!" she exclaimed. "Just think of the courage she must have had."

"And lack of good sense," Aunt Patience added. "She should have put her foot down. But no, the young simpleton took the chance and followed him into the wilderness. Romantic, Sally calls it. Bah! I call it lack of good sense. What do you say, sir?" she asked Summers.

But Summers did not hear. He had laid the letter on the table and was staring at it through eyes that saw nothing of the paper and fading ink. It was but a background, out of which figures came marching. Tall, resolute John Summers and lovely Prudence Ransome—equal to the demands of the hour, strong enough to meet disaster with a smile. He saw Prudence Ransome, in bridal gown, walk the length of a room filled with men who stood unmoved except by admiration, and with women who furtively patted back their tears. But the tears were only the tears of women witnessing a wedding. They knew nothing of what was going on in the heart of the bride who walked so resolutely to the place where John Summers stood waiting. Then, out of the mists of the past, words came, "To love, cherish, honor and obey . . ." To honor! John Summers did not need that vow. "Till death . . ." What ominous words! To the audience it was a matter dealing with some distant day. But to John Summers and Prudence Ransome . . .

The scene changed. Summers saw them, in the dawn of early morning, riding westward along a dim trail. Then trees closed in behind them. Time, and things un-

seen, were hidden by a flight of years that were without record. He could only imagine the rest. Then he saw the little house where he had been born; remembered the long journey westward when he and his brother Jim had been so fascinated by what lay beyond. Westward the trail kept going, to the new homestead near The Forks. Then Jim, reaching manhood, had taken to wife another woman of courage and pushed on, following the sun's road. But he, Will Summers, had taken the back trail to the place of beginning. What sort of pattern did this make? John Summers had written, "The Fates have entered to change our planned course and shape our destinies." What was destiny? Where did it have its beginnings?

"What do you say, sir?" Aunt Patience repeated querulously.

"I beg pardon!" Summers came back to the present. "I was dreaming. Thinking about them—about all of us. I did not hear your question."

"I say they were a pair of young simpletons. If he had loved her he would have kept himself out of that duel."

"But she couldn't marry a man who thought no more of her than that," Sally argued. "Aunt Patience never sees that point, Cousin Will. We have debated it a hundred times."

"Maybe you both forget the principals," Summers said.

"What do you mean?" Sally asked.

"That he was a Summers—and she was a Ransome. Ordinary rules wouldn't apply."

Aunt Patience rapped approval with her staff. "Yes,

indeedy!" she exclaimed, her eyes alight. "Young man, I tell you again that you are the spitten image of John Summers. But——" she halted and searched for qualification, "but, you got your brains from your grandmother."

Aunt Patience had been sitting in judgment, and now she had spoken. Her decision left no room for argument and it permitted no appeal.

On other nights, when other alleged kinsmen came visiting, Aunt Patience early retired to her room, leaving Sally to get what comfort she could from the company of a man who had failed to secure the indorsement of the family historian. To-night she took a seat in the parlor and proceeded to assist the young know-nothings in reconstructing the pages from the past. At last Samuel Ransome, despairing of getting in any word about dogs, discreetly took his leave. But Aunt Patience held on. At last she had found a listener.

So well did Summers listen, and so great was Aunt Patience's approval of him, that when he drove back to town he carried with him the old letter written by his grandsire.

Aunt Patience had delivered her verdict.



Chapter Three

A MAN AFRAID

I

BY CHRISTMAS Summers began to have a conscious realization that he was driving himself to a task for which he had slight appetite. Back in those days when he rode to Lon's store to spend the day and half the night in the reading of books which he knew almost by rote, he had fixed his heart upon the study of law without once asking himself why he should make such choice. Actually it was only a way of escape. Lon had been out in the world, had seen things, and his stories and the magic of his books had opened a new world to Summers which he was forced to view from a distance. To inherit it, he must find a path. The law would surely take him out, if only a little way. This thought, voiced to Lon, had met instant approval and encouragement.

Then, before the opportunity had come along, the colonization of Texas had fired him with the old desire of his youth—to follow the sun's road. Here was the way out, and with stout-hearted company. But Lon and Abel, happy in their place, had fixed ideas of the path he should follow. For once they had worked their will with him and now, a short three months after his arrival in Washington, he was beginning to doubt their wisdom and his own. It was all a trick of blind, unreasoning Fate.

More and more he became convinced that he was out of his element. Although he was always welcomed at the Buells' and the Ransomes', he was forced into and through certain social customs which he feared because he felt that he lacked grace. For example, there was the matter of learning to dance. Carolin had insisted upon it and he was forced to admit to himself that he rather enjoyed the instruction. With her he felt at ease. She glossed over his blundering mistakes, praised his successes, made him confident. But when it came to dancing with others—and, foolishly, the other young people had the notion that the bigger the crowd the better the dance—then it was that he felt the eyes of the crowd upon him. Analyzing this one night, he came face to face with the staggering thought that it was not the people, nor the games, nor the dances that interested him—it was Carolin. Then fear laid hold of him. If this were true, then he was a fool indeed. She was a woman of position; he a woodsman struggling for position. Indeed, he often wondered if they were not interested in him in much the same way that the House and Senate had been interested in Crockett's re-election. Doubtless they looked upon him as a specimen.

He determined to give it a test. He rejected the next invitation that Carolin extended, offering some vague excuse. That night he sat in his room and was made miserable by mental pictures that somehow could not be shut out. He could see Carolin sitting at the head of the table, directing the conversation. Strangely, this mental picture included no other women. But it included many men, all of whom had eyes only for Carolin. Then

the dancing came. He could see the men crowding around her, paying her pretty compliment.

He paced the floor that night. He had put it to a test and now he knew. He considered it all the more reason why he should stay away. Perhaps, after all, it was time to turn back and admit that he had taken the wrong step. Still and all, could he make any such admission to bustling old Major Langstone? More than that, did he dare admit it to himself?

Even as he answered this last question he felt somehow that the new fierceness of his determination was greatly strengthened by the knowledge that it was not the law that held him, not the sense of obligation—it was Carolin Buell. He could not turn his back on her. How easy it was to become resolute about sticking to the law when she entered the back of his mind. Or was she ever out of it?

2

In January Crockett reached Washington. His eager inquiries to Major Langstone concerning Summers' welfare and progress, and the whole-hearted, flattering reports which the major gave him, fired Summers with a renewed determination to accomplish what he had undertaken. These men believed in him; he alone doubted. But if he was to win he must fix his mind upon the law and not upon what others might be thinking.

More and more he kept away from the Buells' and the Ransomes'. He would first establish in his own mind

the right to the confidence which others had in him. Other things could come later. Night after night he sat alone in the Major's office, reading ponderous volumes until the type faded and dreams came. Then the banished thoughts of the waking hours came trooping in and held the stage. However great his determination when awake, Carolin Buell entered his dreams.

Night after night during that long winter he read till sleep came, then later awoke to walk slowly homeward, wondering if time would bring a little more money, a little more polish and learning. That was the thing he needed—learning. Yet once, when he thought of this, he laughed outright. Why, courage was the thing he needed. Even if he had all the learning of all the wise men he would still lack the courage to even hope . . . What a fool he was to think of hope! Hadn't Jeff told him openly that nearly every man proposed to Carolin—men of wealth, culture and position? It was a desolating thought. He had best quit thinking about hope—while there was yet time.

Thank God there was forgetfulness in books!

3

Spring came, and then Summers found it more and more difficult to find forgetfulness in books. Back in Tennessee the woodland trails would be fringed with flowers; little spring branches would be singing the plaintive glad song that is never the same at any other season of the year; wild crab trees would be in bloom; neighbors and friends would be coming down to The Forks to sit

with Lon under the shade of the oak. No book in all the world could crowd out his feeling of homesickness. Indeed, they only made him the more restless.

One April day, when nostalgia had him in its firm grip, Crockett came into the office in company with Jefferson Buell.

"Will," Crockett began, "Major Langstone tells me you're workin' too hard. And Jeff says they haven't been able to drag you out to his house with a yoke of oxen for the past month. By dogs! if I was your age, and single, a yoke of oxen couldn't keep me *away*! What are you tryin' to do—read all the law that's been written?"

"It doesn't seem to be hurting me, does it?" Summers replied.

"Well, I dunno. You look a little pale around the gills. But it's the season, maybe. It gits me that-a-way, too. I'd as soon be in hell carryin' water in a sieve as to be in Washington, when Spring comes, listenin' to a bunch of rag-tags and bobbins vote Aye on every proposition that Old Hero happens to want to slide over on the people."

"What's the matter now, Colonel?" Summers asked as he gave Buell a sly wink.

"Matter enough! Did you hear my speech the other day?"

"No, I'm sorry. I haven't been over to the House lately."

"Well, I give it to 'em straight, I can tell you. Just now they've got the appropriation bills under consideration and I've passed my word that I'll never vote for

them until I know where the money's comin' from. I'll be eternally damned if I'll vote for the spending of a lot of money so long as Jackson holds the purse strings and I don't know where the money is or where it's comin' from. If he can seize the treasury and move it around without sayin' if, and, or but, to anybody, then he can try gettin' the money for appropriations as best he can. But he'll git it without Crockett votin' 'Aye.' I may be a bear hunter from the canebrakes, but I won't wear a collar with an inscription on it what reads, 'My dog, Andrew Jackson'."

"What do you aim to do about it, Colonel?"

"I reckon there's not much I can do about it except yell loud enough for the folks in my districk to know that Crockett's agin any man that's agin the people. They'll know by my bark that I've still got my nose on the trail of them dee-posits. My doctor tells me I'd ought to take a little rest, so I'm goin' to take a trip up through the northeastern states during the next two-three weeks. I sorta like the idea, for it will give me a chance to see what manner of folks live up there. There won't be anything goin' on in the House during that time except a sight of talk and argument about appropriations. When they figger they've talked enough to earn their pay, they'll pass the bills just like Old Hero says. Maybe you can get Jeff here to prescribe a rest for you, Will, and you can come along with me."

"No, thanks, Colonel. You're headed in the wrong direction to suit me. If you were going the other way it would be a temptation."

"Homesick, Will?"

"Yes."

"Tired of the law?"

"No-o," slowly. "But I get to wondering—sometimes."

"Shucks! Major Langstone was just tellin' me the other day that you could soon pass the board. I told him we had men practicin' out in our state that hadn't ever passed any board and didn't have half as much sense as you was born with. I told him about a lawyer over in my old districk, named Banion, who rode into town one day on a mule and saw where one of his old neighbors from over in East Tennessee had hung up his shingle and was holdin' out to be a lawyer. 'Well,' says Banion to himself, 'if that fellow can be a lawyer, so can I.' So he went over and told the judge the same thing. The judge called a meeting of the bar and give him an examination. One of the lawyers said, 'Young man, what is meant by descent and distribution?' Banion told me he gulped kinda loud over that one but the judge spoke up and said, 'Hell, don't embarrass the young man,' and then he turned to him and said, 'Banion, are you a judge of good whiskey?' Banion allowed that he'd ought to be since he made the best whiskey in Tennessee, and the judge said, 'Show the Court the evidence.' So Banion went out to his saddle bags and brought in a bottle of as good whiskey as was ever made in those mountains. Well, sir, he used to tell me he was afraid the bottle wouldn't hold out until it got around. He passed the board slick enough, and he's bin practicin' back there ever since. Why, Will, you could go back to Jackson right now and run out most the lawyers there." The thought amused Crockett.

He chuckled reminiscently. "You ran one out, Will, even when you didn't know any law."

Summers frowned. "Yes, and it was a poor job. I just got a letter from my brother Jim, in Texas, and he mentions that a lawyer from Madison, by the name of Crenshaw, has opened an office in Nacogdoches."

"No!" Crockett exclaimed. "By dogs! A bad penny always turns up. Does your brother know anything about——"

"No," Summers broke in and gave Crockett a wink. He did not want Jefferson to know any more than had already been told. "No, he seemed pleased about it. Anybody from Tennessee seems like home folks to Jim, 'way out there."

"I reckon so," Crockett agreed, and then added, significantly, "but I've knowed a sight of folks from Tennessee that I wasn't exactly proud of. You goin' to write Jim about Crenshaw?" he asked.

"No. Why should I? He'll show his stripe quick enough. Jim could always smell a skunk as quick as the next one."

"It's funny," Crockett mused, "that he would even settle down in the same county with a Summers. But from the way things are goin' out there he won't stay long. From what I can hear Texas is goin' to be too hot before long for any but the brave—and I reckon that lets Crenshaw out. Sooner or later there's goin' to be a fight out there. There'd be one goin' on now if Old Hero had enough backbone to protect the rights of American citizens and——"

"You know good and well that they are no longer

American citizens once they take up homes there," Summers flared. "If you got the measles I think you would blame it on Jackson."

Crockett grinned and twirled his hat on one finger. "Still a Jackson man, I see. Well, Will, there's no use wastin' good speeches on you. But you can drive in this peg and then tie to it: An American can't become a Mexican, and he won't stand for bein' ruled by anybody but himself. Texas may be Mexican territory now, but not forever. You don't hear the things I do. It's a sin and a shame the way the Mexican Government has mistreated the colonists. By cracks! if they ever git up the nerve to strike a blow for freedom I hope to be shot if I don't shoulder my Betsey and light out for Texas and tell Old Hero and the whole passel of his law-makers to go to hell! Come on Jeff," he said, turning to Buell, "let's go on down the street. Will's got my dander up."

"I want to have a talk with Summers," Jeff told him.

"Oh, I didn't know." Crockett walked to the door. There he turned and said: "If you're any good as a doctor, Jeff, you'll git Will away from this office and out to your home a little more. There's no devil and no heaven if Crockett doesn't know what ails a young fellow when Spring comes and there's a pretty girl not more'n a whoop and a holler away."

Summers tried to cover his embarrassment with a forced smile. Actually he felt a secret desire to throw something. When Crockett had passed through the door, Buell said:

"Major Langstone tells me you will be a full-fledged lawyer by fall."

"He seems to think so," Summers answered, somewhat skeptically, "but I'm not so sure."

"You've worked hard enough. Since Christmas you've kept your nose in these books. We've missed you a lot out home."

"And I've missed you," Summers admitted frankly. "But I came here to work."

"Um-m!" Buell mused. "You know the old saying about 'all work and no play.' Carolin's birthday comes on Tuesday, next week, and we are going to have a party. You'll come, won't you?"

"Why, yes, of course." Summers was glad that the occasion was such that he could not well decline.

"Good! See here, Will, I want you——" Jeff hesitated and shifted uneasily in his chair—"I want you to help me a little."

"Help you? How?"

"Gant is coming back." Jeff's voice had a note of hopeless despair.

"I can't very well stop that, Jeff."

"Neither can I, but you can help me out. He will be here in a few days, according to what Sally says."

"She has heard from him?" Summers asked in surprise.

"Yes. She got a lot of fun out of telling Carolin about it. She knew well enough that Carolin would tell me."

"Do you think Sally really cares for him?" Summers asked pointedly.

"I don't know. No one ever knows what Sally is thinking. Maybe she does, and maybe she is only keeping me in hot water."

"I see. Well, then, do you think he loves her?"

Jeff struck the arm of his chair with his closed fist. "No, damn it, that's just it! He is a philanderer, Will, and I want to prove it to Sally. If he really cared, and she loved him—well, I wouldn't say a word, though I would hate like the devil to see her marry Gant. His eyes are not right, Will, and I never saw a man with a mouth like his who could tell the truth."

"Yet you didn't notice those things at first."

"Blast it! He didn't make eyes at Sally at first."

"Who did he make eyes at?" Summers asked, trying to appear indifferent.

"At Carolin, of course. I was used to that. Everybody acts a little foolish around Carolin. I knew she didn't like him, so it made no difference. But I can trap him, if you will help me."

"How?"

"I want you to pay a lot of attention to Carolin. The minute Gant sees that, he'll change his tune, or I miss my guess. And the minute Sally notices it, I *know* she will change her tune. I know Sally. She gets interested in any man who shows an interest in Carolin."

"Sally get interested in me? Pooh! You forget that we are kin," Summers said.

"Pshaw! What difference does that make to Sally? Don't you remember what I told you about the nigger marrying Carolin to a neighbor boy? Neither Carolin nor Sally have forgotten, I can tell you. Can't you see how it will work?"

Summers was silent for a long minute. "What if it doesn't work?" he asked at last.

"Then I will know—the worst."

"My part isn't a very difficult one," Summers said, smiling. "It would be far harder *not* to be interested in Carolin. Does she know anything about this?"

"Heavens, no! No woman would stand for that. She would have to think you were in earnest."

"So would I." Summers answered tartly. "I am not Gant, Jeff. I don't know how to philander."

"Oh, I didn't mean just that! I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

"I know. But can't you see that in putting out your fire I am likely to burn my own hands?"

Jeff's eyes opened wide in amazement. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that when I saw Carolin in Tennessee I knew then that I wanted to come to Washington to study law. I hadn't been here two months before I discovered it wasn't the law that held my interest. I may as well tell you this. I'll never have the courage to tell anyone else. That's why I have been keeping away from your house."

Jeff sprang from his chair and began walking up and down the room. "Good Lord, Will! I didn't know. Somehow I thought you—well, I just didn't think of it."

"Of course, you wouldn't think of it," Summers' voice was a little bitter. "She wouldn't think of it, either. Nor would anyone else. That's one reason why your plan wouldn't work. Carolin would just be amused. I would be the laughing stock. I am only a backwoodsman come to town."

Jeff turned and faced him squarely, his eyes flashing with a light Summers had never before discovered there.

"That doesn't sound like you, Will. I have never thought of you in that light. I have never thought of you as being inferior. If you think so, then by the gods! you are. I thought of you as a man. I'm sure that's what Carolin thinks. If you haven't any more courage than that, then we are wrong. Yes, I know this is straight talk. You need straight talk. I thought you were a man of courage. When Crockett was here a while ago you thought you were keeping me in the dark about that man Crenshaw. Crockett told me all about that. Carolin knows about it—so does Sally. So does everyone else. It is one of Crockett's favorite stories. He calls you brave. Humph! And you afraid of a woman!"

Summers had been staring at the floor, thinking it a bit strange that instead of feeling resentment he was admiring Jeff more than ever before. Abel Roundtree was the only man in the world who had ever talked to him in this fashion.

"No, I'm not afraid, Jeff," he said, looking up. "But I have sense enough to know my limitations."

Jeff took up his hat and walked to the door. There he turned and said:

"The party is next Tuesday night, Will. In the meantime you can think this over: A man who admits limitations—*is afraid.*"



Chapter Four

TRAGEDY—THE BROOD HEN

I

SUMMERS knew there was wisdom in Jeff's challenge to his courage. Not only did he attend the birthday party, but thereafter availed himself of every opportunity to be with Carolin. Jeff, however, had made a poor guess in the matter of the rivalry between Sally and Carolin. This was soon evident and before the summer was half gone Jeff was in despair.

September came and Gant was still in town. He was a constant visitor at the Ransome home and was still made welcome at the Buells'. Jeff, though playing a losing game, was too shrewd to show his chagrin by forcing any break with his rival. He still had hope that Sally would tire of Gant, and he knew that any open criticism would only strengthen Gant's position. So he managed to hold his tongue and his temper, but secretly prayed for Gant's early return to Texas.

Near the middle of September Summers went before an examining board for admission to the bar. The board, appointed by a Circuit Judge, was made up of old attorneys who were far too wise to expect a youth to know all that they had learned. They intended to pass him if he showed ordinary ability. Indeed, for them it was enough to know that Major Langstone was his sponsor. They were merely observing a formality.

To Summers it was a grave occasion, fraught with dire possibilities. For an hour they questioned him, assuming as much sage decorum as they could command at a time when they would far rather be telling stories. When at last they felt that the dignity of the law had been upheld, a motion for admission was made and promptly carried.

The suddenness of the action dazed Summers. He had expected a much more difficult time. He did not know that his examination had been much more difficult than that given the average aspirant. In fact, half the lawyers in the country had never passed any examination whatsoever. In many states the only requisite to practice was the desire and sufficient funds to keep the wolf from the door while waiting for clients to come. But Major Langstone was a man of dignity and had arranged for the board because he wanted it definitely established that his new associate was a man of some ability.

The following Saturday afternoon Summers rode out to the Buells'. In his heart was a new courage. He had reached one goal. No longer would he be forced to scrimp and count every penny. Fees would be coming in, and as a partner with Major Langstone he could hold up his head. He had looked forward to this hour. Until now his lips had been sealed. Not until he had accomplished something could he speak to Carolin and tell her of the love that had been growing until it had become the one thing that was never out of his mind. Now, at last, perhaps he had a right to hope. He was no longer just a woodsman.

As he rode along he determined to stake his chances

on the first opportunity. He even found himself hoping that the opportunity would come this very evening.

In this he was doomed to disappointment. Gant was there, with Sally, and to Summers the outlook for the evening was dreary and dull. He had no tongue for their footless conversation. His mind and heart were fixed upon a subject of the first magnitude. Carolin, he thought, was more lovely than ever before. He observed, or thought he observed, that Gant was conscious of the same thing. And, adding to his misery, it seemed that Carolin was more gracious to Gant than was her wont. He noticed, too, that little Sally Ransome was less bright and sparkling. Her eyes were all for Gant, though once or twice Summers thought he discovered there a look of wistfulness or of growing doubt. But he accounted for this when, during the course of dinner table conversation, Gant announced that he was planning to return to Texas the following week. Summers glanced at Jeff and saw there a look of suppressed elation, but Sally sat with her hands in her lap, staring at her plate. Sally, for some reason, was far from being happy.

Gant, having introduced the subject of Texas, went on to relate some of the problems and the hardships facing the different colonies. He no longer painted it as a land of promise flowing with milk and honey. He painted stark word pictures, hinted of an ominous future filled with strife, and flatly declared that at present it was no place for a married man.

Again Summers glanced at Sally. She was still studying her plate.

"A year ago you were telling a different story," Sum-

mers said to Gant. To-night, for some reason, he was heartily disliking the man. Perhaps he and Jefferson had a common complaint.

"Much can happen in a year," Gant answered evenly. "Austin is a prisoner in Mexico City and many of his colonists are turning back. Affairs in his colony are chaotic. He is learning that he can't blow hot and cold toward the Government."

"I thought you were an Austin man," Summers said. The statement was sheer invention, made in the hope of discovering Gant's true status.

"I am for Austin so long as he is for the Government," Gant answered. "Rebellion would fail. The United States would be forced to recognize the rights of the Mexican Government. A few hundred poorly armed colonists could not successfully oppose Santa Anna and his trained soldiers."

"Then you are now a Santa Anna man?" Summers asked, remembering that Major Langstone had once warned him that Gant was a creature of duplicity.

Gant's dark face colored; his eyes narrowed. He had the appearance of a man who suddenly realizes that he has talked too much. Sensing this, Summers decided to follow up his advantage.

"I have heard it rumored," he went on, inventing fiction which he thought was near the actual truth, "that you are here in the interest of the Mexican Government."

Carolyn was quick to step into the breach. "Let's talk of something besides Texas," she said. "A year ago Jefferson was boring me to death with the subject. He

wanted to go there to practice medicine. Of all places!"

"I still want to go," Jeff said doggedly. "If I don't get a chance to practice pretty soon I will have forgotten all I learned."

"And I suppose you still want me to go along," Carolin said, "even after all Mr Gant has just told you." She turned to Summers. "I don't know where Jeff ever got this pioneering idea. The Buells have always lived right here."

"Always?" Summers questioned. "Maybe Jeff came by it honestly. Some of the family must have had it—not a great many years back. You can't blame a man for wanting to make a place for himself."

Carolin tossed her head and her eyes lighted with determination. "Then why not make it here?" she asked. "Why be crowded out? But no, like thousands of other men he runs away from the conflict and then boasts about being a pioneer. That may be all right for the men, but what of the women? Remember, I was out in Tennessee and I saw some things there that just broke my heart. So many of the women were wan, dragged, tired, with a look of hunger and longing in their eyes—hungry for the things they can never have; longing for the things they once dreamed of."

"Oh, come now!" Jeff said, noticing Summers' look of surprise. "Many of those women must be quite happy. They have their own lives to live, and they have the love of their husbands and——"

"I am not so sure about that," Carolin said. "If a man truly loved a woman, would he impose such hardships?"

Summers glanced across at Sally and found her eyes seeking his. Both of them were seeing the same thing—Prudence Ransome going into the wilderness with John Summers.

"All that a brave woman asks," Sally answered Carolin's question, though she was looking straight at Gant, "is the right to be with the man she loves and help work out his destiny, regardless of the hardship."

"Yes, but the man gains his point subtly," Carolin answered. "I never heard of a woman who urged her husband into the wilderness. The man first makes the plans and then calls the woman into council. If he finds her opposed, he appears to abandon his plan, as though it were of no consequence, but hinting that he may be missing an opportunity. He knows he has planted the seed of fear in her heart—fear that she may be holding him back from his true estate. In the end she begins to make it appear that his dream has become her desire. She surrenders and takes up the burden. Can't you see how unfair it is?"

She paused to look first at Gant, then at Jeff and last at Summers. Will's face was as coldly uncommunicative as the face of the Sphinx. Whatever his thoughts, they were hidden behind a mask. She realized that here was exactly the type of man whom women had followed along the wilderness trails. She wondered, vaguely, if she would not follow him, gladly, to the ends of the earth. The thought brought a stunning fear to her heart. She repented her words. In an effort to spur Jeff to greater effort, to awaken ambition in him, she had not been entirely true to herself. Now, beyond doubt, Summers

was looking upon her as a pampered, sheltered, comfort-seeking butterfly. Woman's sure divination had made her believe that some day he would tell her what she knew was in his heart. But now—he would never speak now. He was the product of a long line of courageous women.

"Oh, I know what you are all thinking!" she said in despair. "But I don't want Jeff to go off to that new country. It is dangerous—Mr Gant admits it—and success is to be had where you make it. I don't want Jeff to go because—because he is all I have, and should he go, woman-like I would follow him."

Her eyes became moist and for a moment she seemed about to lose control. Summers, not knowing what was in her heart, thought it only a display of emotional determination. Jeff reached over and patted her hand.

"There, there," he soothed, "don't think about it any more. If you don't want me to go, that's the end of it. I know how you feel."

"No you don't, Jeff." Carolin answered. "Always, from now on, I will have it in my mind that you are not happy here and that I am the one keeping you from what you call your chance. Doubtless I will end up in this hideous Texas place—now that the seed is planted."

"And Texas would be much the richer and blossom as never before," was Gant's ready compliment. He never missed such opportunities.

It irritated Summers to the point of explosion. Sally bit her lips and tilted her chin. Jeff, seeing this, and not knowing that she was seized by fear rather than jealousy, chuckled inwardly. Carolin, observing Sum-

mers' look, took new hope. It is a good sign when one man resents another man's compliment. She shifted the conversation adroitly, but Summers took no part in it. He was thinking of a certain John Summers who had married a woman whose courage was as great as her love.

After dinner they passed into the great living room where, by chance, Summers was thrown into conversation with Sally. Carolin, Jeff and Gant stood in a little group near the heavy walnut mantel arching the cavernous fireplace. Summers had little thought for what Sally was saying. He had heard Jeff make use of his name and, without any conscious effort to eavesdrop, was trying to listen to Sally while at the same time his ears were trained to hear what was going on behind him. Directly over Sally's shoulder hung a great mirror, in which Summers could see the reflection of the little group near the fireplace. Carolin's face was held out in bold relief by two candelabra on the wall.

"You hit Will pretty hard, Carolin," he heard Jeff say in guarded tones. "All of his people were pioneers, you know."

Summers tried to fix his attention upon what Sally was saying. But it was no good. Carolin's answer came through the cross fire.

"Yes, but he gave it up for better things."

He heard Gant's low laugh. "Just an interesting experiment," Gant said, making no effort to guard his voice. "A woodsman trying to beat back."

Summers glanced in the glass. Jeff showed resentment, but not a word came from Carolin. He could

no longer hear Sally's voice. He was waiting for some word of rebuke from Carolin. He saw her lift her head and start to speak. Then her eyes found his in the mirror. He quickly shifted his eyes to Sally, but his ears were still attuned. No words came from Carolin—not a single word of rebuke. Gant was now talking about something else.

Summers felt a wave of hot anger sweep over him. So that was what she thought! He was only an interesting experiment! She was like all the others who made up the aristocracy of Washington. They were merely amused by such woodsmen as Jackson, Crockett, and the long train of others who had been swept into Washington by Jackson's election. And he had dared lift his eyes to her! Dared? Ha! Had been fool enough, was the better phrase. Why, little Sally Ransome, giddy as she was, was the only woman he had met who had courage. But then, by the eternal! she was a Ransome.

He led her over to a settee near the wall. "You are sorry Mr Gant is going back to Texas?" he asked directly, finding a new and sudden interest in her now that his own dream had been shattered.

She lifted her eyes and looked at him for a long minute, searching for understanding.

"Yes, Cousin Will, I am."

"Then you—you really care for him?"

She was now studying the tips of two dainty slippers.

"I did—I thought—Oh, yes, I do!" This last, Summers thought, had a quality of fierceness not needed to convey the fact. She was reassuring herself.

"What about Jeff?" Summers asked.

Again she became keenly interested in the points of her slippers.

"Oh, I wish I had never—that is—poor Jeff! Let's not talk about it, Cousin Will. I can't—no one will—could ever understand."

"I suppose not," Summers answered, and tried to mask his feelings as he looked across the room to where Jeff and Gant were talking with Carolin. Merciful Heaven! Gant, of all men, married to a Ransome!

The world was all upside-down . . . and dark . . . and hopeless . . . For him and for Jeff.

He knew, now, how men feel when the light of their world goes out.

2

Summers rode back to town that night burning with the fire of a new determination. Not for one second did he think of surrender. He would show them that a woodsman could beat back. Who was Gant, after all! And who were the Buells? Aristocrats, playing at living. But he was a Summers and a Ransome, the get of Cavaliers, who for long generations had ridden the highways of life, searching for conflict, eager for a jousting.

By the time he had reached his room his anger had abated somewhat and pride became a comfortless thing. After all, he held a broken dream and he knew that his pride, though comfortless, would never stoop to tinker and cobble with the fragments of what had been a thing beautiful to look upon. What was success? What

could he win? What was the good of riding to tournament when the Queen of Beauty looked upon the rider as a court fool in cap and bells, bearing no shield of heraldry and armed with a shattered lance.

The hopes and the dreams that had driven him on had died. From now on he must drive himself with the cruel whip of heedless determination. He could hear Abel Roundtree saying, "Will's the bullheadedest man . . ." Well, it had its advantages.

At that same hour Carolin Buell was burying her face in a pillow wet with tears, and a mile away little Sally Ransome sat alone with fear.

Three people had made mistakes and were learning that love, fallen into error, is the costliest thing in all the world.

3

Summers plunged into the work at the office with a new zeal that left Major Langstone congratulating himself that he had found a young man utterly different from the frivolous youth of the day. Here was a young man, the Major boasted to his friends, who was worth his salt. He would make a place for himself, Egad! Just wait and see.

With the coming of the fall months the Buell home again became the social Mecca for many of the young people of the city. Two of Jeff's invitations Summers accepted because he would have cut off an arm rather than let them know he was hurt. On each occasion Carolin was more than gracious, but Summers blindly shut

the door in his own face. Not again would he be the fool. And, so thinking, he became a fool indeed.

Jeff continued to drop into the office from time to time, but he was spiritless and downcast. Gant was still in town, offering first one explanation and another for his delayed departure. This was poison in Jeff's cup. Summers liked Jeff, and knew that Jeff liked him, but he knew also that men and women see values differently. Jeff's estimate was a far different thing from Carolin's.

Buried in the sorrow of his own failure to win Sally, and in the annoyance of Gant's continued presence, Jeff lost sight of the fact that Summers had once admitted a strong interest in Carolin. Besides, he reasoned, Summers was a man who must be left to handle things in his own way.

One day in late November Summers received a letter from Texas, addressed in Mary's handwriting. He opened it eagerly. Before he had read a dozen lines he caught his breath sharply and his hands dropped to his side.

Jim was dead—murdered! It took several minutes for that fact to sink in. Why read more, when that first fact was beyond understanding? At a long last he again took up the letter, reading hurriedly now, seeking only the high lights.

It was a tearful, pathetic recital. Jim's title had been challenged by a Mexican claiming prior right, and a few days later some unknown person had shot him in the back as he stood at the woodpile gathering an arm load of firewood.

After the funeral, (Mary's letter went on) the alcalde

had issued an order of ouster and she was put off the land. She was now stopping with some friends in Nacogdoches. But she did not know what she was going to do. There were the three children, and Jim had not been able to save much. The cotton crop, ready for picking, passed with the land. She was writing because she had no one else to whom she could turn and Jim had always said that blood was thicker than water.

When Summers had finished reading through the first time, he went back to the beginning and read slowly. In the little sidelights, which he had skipped or failed to analyze on the first reading, the tragedy stood out sharper than ever. And in the end was the challenge—"Jim always talked so much about you and always said that blood was thicker than water."

So it was. Summers arose and walked into the inner office. With a terse, "Read that," he handed the letter to Major Langstone.

"Well, well!" the Major exclaimed after reading a few lines. "What's this? 'Pon my——"

"Read on—please."

When the Major had finished he, too, was speechless.

"Well—well——" he began at last, searching for the right thing to say. "'Pon my word! This is—er—staggering!"

"I'll have to go to her," Summers said, his voice full of emotion.

"What? Nonsense, my boy! What can you do?"

"I can be there, for one thing. That's something."

"But you can't——"

"I can't do anything else, Major. I'm sorry, after

all you have done for me, but I'll have to go. Jim was right. In our family, blood is thicker than water."

"Yes, of course. But you—er—ahem! That is——"

"Wait a minute," Summers said. "I've something in the other room that will make it clearer."

A moment later he came back with the old letter which John Summers had written to his brother on the day before he met the British officer on the field of honor.

"Read this old letter," he said, handing it to the Major. "It will show you what a Summers expects of a brother."

Major Langstone arose, brushed the letter aside and placed both his hands on Will's shoulders. "I have no need to read anything, my boy. You'll do what you think is right, just as I expect you to do. When you have fixed things up—if they can be fixed—your place will be waiting for you here."

"Thank you, Major. I can't say—now. I don't know what I will find; I don't know what to expect. But I will never forget all you have done for me."

The Major gave him an understanding squeeze of the hand. Words could say no more.

4

Tragedy is a brood hen careless of her chicks because the hatch is great.

That night, as Summers was packing his old flowered portmanteau, Jefferson Buell came to the room and knocked insistently at the door. When admitted, he sank limply into a chair. White-faced, tight-lipped, he sat staring at the floor.

"What's the matter, Jeff?" Summers asked anxiously, bending over him.

"Sally's dead," Jefferson answered, his voice as colorless as his face.

"What? Dead! Good God! I didn't even know she was sick. When did she——"

"Some time just after noon. We don't know just when. Read that."

With a purely mechanical motion he handed Summers a crumpled letter.

"Read it," he insisted when Summers hesitated at the sight of Jeff's name on the back of the envelope. "It's from—from her."

Moving nearer the candles on the mantel, Summers drew the single sheet from the envelope. It took but a minute to read the brief letter. His fingers began fumbling at the corner of the sheet. Smitten, he sagged against the mantel for support. What could he say?

"Has anyone else seen this?" he asked at last.

"No."

"Does anyone else—know?"

"Only Doctor Morrow. He came just as I got there. Of course he—discovered. But he will never say a word. Professional ethics, you know, and he is an old friend of the family. Her father is nearly crazy, Will, nearly crazy! And so am I. I left as soon as I could to come into town and look for him. But—but he is gone."

"Gone? Who?"

Jeff sprang from his chair. His eyes, red and deep-set, shifted uneasily and a trembling thumb and forefinger plucked nervously at his lower lip.

"Who?" he repeated as one in a daze, and then remembering, he shouted, "Who? Gant, you fool! Can't you read? Can't you see that she—she named him? Gant, who ate my bread, called me friend and said pretty things to my own sister. Friend, hell! He did that—and then ran."

"You mean—he has left town?"

"Yes. Sailed this morning on the *Argus*, bound for the mouth of the Brazos. Oh, poor, poor little Sally! She couldn't face the disgrace—alone."

He dropped into a chair and hid his face in his cupped hands.

Wordless, and without heart to fashion words, Summers rested a hand on Jeff's shaking shoulder. There was nothing to say, nothing to do. Another man's world had died.

"By God, I will kill him yet!" Jeff said between sobs. "I will! I will!" The words lacked force. His tearful anger was pathetically weak. He lacked force even when wrath was fanned to flame by the bellows of vengeance. With weak, trembling hands he forced himself from his chair and faced Summers with gleaming, tear-filled eyes.

"I'll find him! I'll find him! I'll go after him, I'll find him, and I'll kill him! What's the best way to Texas, Will?"

"Overland, through Tennessee—with me, Jeff. We both have reason to go."

BOOK FOUR:
THE BRIGHT STAR RISES



Chapter One

AT OLD NACOGDOCHES

I

IN THE soft dusk of a late March evening four men sat around a small camp fire at the edge of the timber flanking the Sabine River. Out where the trees met the grass land four picketed horses munched hungrily in the lush grass. Three of the men were devouring the last strips of venison which they had broiled over the coals. The fourth man, suffering from a fever, sat propped against a tree, holding a cool, wet handkerchief to his brow. His companions ate in silence, to the last morsel, and licked the juices from their fingers.

"There!" Abel Roundtree said with a sighing finality as he leaned back against his saddle. "That's that. I could eat more without hurtin'. I'd orghter left the grease on my fingers fer breakfast."

"We can get a turkey when the moon comes up," Summers answered. "There's bound to be a roost along the river here. Jeff and I will go up stream and you go down. We are out of meal and nearly everything else, but meat is better than nothing. I guess we can hold over until to-morrow night."

"How much farther is it to Nacogdoches, Will?" Bullard asked, lifting himself up on his elbow. "I'm burning up with this blasted fever and those pills Doc gave me make me sicker than ever."

"According to the map it is about fifty miles," Summers told him. "We can make it by to-morrow night if we can locate the ferry in the morning. I don't know where we got off the trail. We'd been better off if we had swung south at Jonesborough and picked up the Old Spanish Road at Natchitoches. That's the main road to Nacogdoches."

"Them's the damndest names," Abel commented. "I never know which one you're talkin' about. But if there's a ferry south of here I motion we head fer it."

"We will go north a few miles first," Summers said. "We should come to Gaines's ferry soon."

"I don't care whose ferry 'tis, jes' so it's a ferry," Abel answered. "I'm tired of swimmin' rivers and wadin' swamps. I've had these buckskin britches of mine wet and dry so many times in the last month that I can't stoop over any more without first settin' down in the water to take out the shrink. I'll be mighty glad when we git where we're goin'. That's Texas right acrost the river, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"Thank God! I hope you'll be satisfied then. I reckon we'll stay in that funny soundin' town a right smart time, Will?"

"I don't know. That depends."

"It don't depend as far as I'm concerned—not by a jugful! Old Pete has wore his hoofs off plumb up to the fetlocks—and I'm ailin'. And Lon here is sicker'n a hound pup that has jumped a pole cat. When you and Doc Buell here come from Washington and talked me and Lon into this thing you said we was goin' to Natchit

—er, Nacogdoches. Danged if I know which. I never can git 'em straight. But when I git to one or t'other that's where I stop. I'd as soon be partnered with a couple of Indians as you and Doc. You both act like yore tongues was sore and you 'pear to be as mad as two wet hens. I like talk."

Silence. Bullard had leaned further back against the tree. Summers and Jefferson Buell sat staring into the fire.

"I like talk!" Abel repeated.

"Well, talk!" Summers answered curtly.

Abel spat into the fire, arose slowly and walked out to the edge of the woods to repicket his horse. He could at least talk to Pete. His voice, lifted in soliloquy for the benefit of all, could be heard at the camp fire. Along the weary miles they had come, Abel often told his horse what he thought of things. As a rule he expressed his opinions in a voice strong enough to be heard by all—if they cared to listen.

"Pete," he now addressed his horse, "you and me would bin better off if we had stayed at home. I'm sorry fer you, seein' you didn't exercise no free will in the matter. It's all my fault. Will talked me into it, but you know how Will is that-a-way when he gits a notion in his head. I'd 'a orghter knowed better than to give up Tennessee fer Texas. From what I can learn from the all-fired few folks we've run acrost in the last four-five days, Hell's a-stewin' over in Texas and the lid's about to blow off. I can't make heads ner tails of it, but if trouble starts, that fool Summers'll git right in the middle of it. And it's my bounden duty to stay

with him and see he don't git hurt. I can't help that now, Pete, but I'm downright sorry fer you."

Throughout the monologue Pete had been far more interested in grass than in conversation, but at this point he lifted his head, bent his ears forward and whinnied softly. Summers' horse, Hard Cash, also lifted his head.

Abel turned quickly and looked south. A lone horseman, indistinct in the dusk, came galloping along the edge of the trees. Abel retreated to the camp fire where he had left his rifle.

"Somebody's comin'," he announced.

"Hello!" A cheery, deep voice sounded just beyond the line where the firelight met the darkness. "Got room and bed for a guest?"

"There's room a-plenty, God knows!" Abel answered. "Light, stranger."

A tall, dark man came striding into the circle of firelight. His face was covered by a stubble of whiskers three or four days old. A large, dilapidated soft hat, shading his eyes, gave him a most forbidding appearance. But this appearance changed instantly when he came close enough for the firelight to find his soft eyes. His lips parted in a smile of friendship.

"My name is Bowie," he said, extending his hand to Summers. His voice had a rich Southern accent.

Summers shook hands warmly. "I am glad to know you, sir. My name is Summers. This is Abel Roundtree . . . And this is Dr Buell, from Washington. That is Mr Bullard there against the tree. He has ridden with a fever all day."

"Are you from Washington, Texas?" Bowie asked as he shook hands with Jefferson Buell.

"Oh, no! Washington, D. C."

"Ah! I thought not from Texas. I thought I knew near every man, woman and child in Texas. I'm glad to see you here, sir. We have need of doctors. You are headed for Texas?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where are you going to locate?"

"Why—er——"

"We missed the trail," Summers broke in irrelevantly. "Isn't there a ferry near here? Gaines's?"

"Yes. About two miles above. I was making for there to-night, but if you are riding on in the morning I will throw in with you. You are going as far as Nacogdoches, I reckon?"

"Yes. I am sorry we can't offer you food, but we just finished our last scrap."

"You are not the first to reach Texas empty-handed," Bowie laughed. "I have a few things in my saddle bags—if I can use your fire."

"Of course."

As Bowie went back to picket his horse and get his saddle bags, Summers turned to the others and said in a low voice:

"Let him do the talking. Abel, try keeping quiet for once."

"That's all I have done since I started on this trip," Abel retorted. "Why should I keep quiet when I meet somebody with enough sense to say somethin'? You'd think I was runnin' from a murder."

"You may run into one—if you talk too much," Summers answered significantly. "Try listening."

Bowie came back, carrying his saddle and bags. A single blanket was rolled tightly and tied across the cantle. In a few minutes he had a strip of meat broiling over the coals. It was a simple meal. Evidently he, too, was traveling light. Abel, who had eyed the bags hungrily, was disappointed that no coffee or meal was brought forth.

When the strip of venison was cooked to his taste, Bowie reached into one of the bags and brought out a loaf of hard bread. From a large scabbard he drew forth a knife, the very sight of which would inspire respect in the heart of the strongest man. It had a razor edge. Bowie sliced off some of the hard bread as though it were butter. Abel's jaws worked hungrily, but he kept his eye on the knife.

Back into the bag went the bread. In despair Abel took a twist of tobacco from his pocket and bit into it savagely. Bowie looked up, eyeing the twist. Catching the expression in his eyes, Abel turned the twist in his hand, as though estimating how long it would last.

"That's the first twist I've seen for a week," Bowie said.

"Is that so?" Abel answered. "Well, that's the first bread I've seen for two days. Maybe we could strike up a trade."

Bowie's jaw dropped in astonishment. He reached for the saddle bag and drew out the bread.

"I'm sorry for my actions," he apologized. "I thought you said you had eaten. Bowie shares what he's got."

He held out the bread, but Summers interposed. "He has eaten, Mr Bowie, though it is true we had no bread. Put it back. We will share it with you to-morrow."

"Oh, no!" Bowie protested. "We can get something up at the ferry. Besides, I've still got my eye on that twist."

"Growed on a Tennessee hillside," Abel said as he handed it over. "I guess Will's right about savin' the bread till mornin', but he wears me out travelin' with him. He's always so danged right."

Bowie broke off a piece of the twist and crammed it into a stubby black pipe. With his bare fingers he picked a coal from the fire, tossed it around in his hand until he at last juggled it to the bowl of the pipe, and then sat puffing contentedly.

"I was lucky to fall in with you," he said at last. "This tobacco's got sunshine in it. Besides, the more the merrier, in this part of the country—especially between here and Nacogdoches. It's filled up with robbers, pirates, filibusterers and lawless Mexicans and whites. You can get your throat slit for a dollar."

Abel sucked in his breath sharply. "Jes' what I told you, Will. No law and no order and the whole country ain't worth a bawbee."

"You are wrong there," Bowie responded. "It is the richest country on earth. That's why it has fetched the scoundrels here as well as the good settlers." He turned to Summers. "You said your name was Summers?"

"Yes, sir."

"I wonder if you are any kin to the Jim Summers that lived east of Nacogdoches?"

"He was my brother. You knew him?"

"Law, yes! I know most all of 'em, I reckon."

"You know how he was killed?"

"Only what I hear. It was in a scrap over his title. Land titles have been in a mighty bad mess in the Edwards colony. About the time a fellow gets everything all cleared up, along comes some Mexican with a shyster lawyer and claims he was an original holder or shows title that has been forged. That's what happened to your brother, according to what I hear."

Summers nodded. "Yes, that's what I made out from the letter his wife wrote me. But she was in distress and didn't go into the details. She wrote that Jim had been killed and that she had been put off the land. How does it happen that titles are so mixed?"

Bowie growled savagely. "Edwards himself mixed things a lot. Texas would be better off if he had never been born. For a little money he would give title to land that wasn't even in his grant or that had been granted by the Mexican government to some Mexican. Then he got in a mess with the alcalde at Nacogdoches and that didn't help his cause any. He and his brother kept doing funny business until the Governor annulled his contract. The upshot was the Fredonia War. I reckon Edwards was at the bottom of that, too. He stirred up the Cherokees until they were ready to help him set up his new state, which he called Fredonia. Humph! Trust him to pick on some high-sounding name. He could use more words and say less than any man in Texas—and we're used to big promises and little action. When Austin heard that Edwards had set up a free state he

sent some men to treat with the Cherokees and tell them just what kind of skunks the Edwards boys were. Then he started to march on Nacogdoches—or Fredonia, as Edwards called it—but by the time his army got there the whole Edwards kit and bilin' had skipped out and crossed the Sabine. That ended Fredonia and the Edwardses. But it didn't clear up the land problem. Shyster lawyers at Nacogdoches, knowing what a mess things were in, would fix up a title for the fellow showing the most money. If the man was a Mexican, the government would back him, no matter how crooked his title. That's only one of the things we have had to contend with.

“According to what I hear, a lawyer in Nacogdoches, working hand in glove with the land agent, fixed up a title for a Mexican that took in nearly all of your brother's land. The idea was for the Mexican to live on it a little while and then sell it to this lawyer for a few dollars. That way the lawyer could get quite a passel of land. It seems they went down to oust your brother and he met 'em with a rifle. They left. But two or three days later, when he was out chopping wood, someone shot him from cover. No one knows who it was. The day after the funeral the Mexican with the forged title came back with an order from the alcalde ordering the widow to vacate. Of course, a woman couldn't meet them with a rifle. A Mexican knows who to jump on.”

At the end of the recital, sympathy for Summers imposed a long silence on the listeners. Abel broke the spell.

"So that's the kind of land you've been braggin' up to us, is it, Will? I could have got into trouble like that closter home."

Summers ignored him. "Have you seen his widow?" he asked Bowie.

"No. She was in Nacogdoches for a while with some friends, but I understand she took her children and went down to San Felipe to get Three-Legged Willie to help her. He's the alcalde at San Felipe, but it's mighty little he can do. He's got his hands full—and then some."

"Is she there now?"

"I don't know, but I'm headed for there."

"So am I," Summers said with quick decision. "I'll ride along with you."

"That's fine. We can be there in——"

"Now, Will," Abel interrupted, "you know Lon's sicker'n hell—and I'm ailin'. Course I can wiggle along, but we've got to give Lon a rest."

Bowie, not realizing the seriousness of Lon's fever, said:

"I have to stay over in Nacogdoches for a day. That will give you a rest."

"I'm afraid that won't be long enough for Lon," Summers said, "but we can leave him there in Jeff's care. Abel and I——"

"Now, Will——"

Summers gave Abel a silencing look. Then he turned back to Bowie. "Mr Roundtree and I will ride on with you," he said. "By the way, Mr Bowie, do you know the man who forged the title to my brother's land?"

"Well, of course I couldn't swear who forged it, but I know who holds the land now."

"Who?"

"A fat little lawyer from your own state. His name's Crenshaw, I believe. He's down in Washington, Texas, now. Things got too hot for him in Nacogdoches."

Abel shifted his position quickly and started to speak. Summers again gave him a black look.

"Sure," Abel completed, "we'll ride on down with you, Mr Bowie. I've bin achin' to see that country down around Washington."

2

Nacogdoches offered many allurements to the weary traveler moving westward. Not the least of these was the fact that it was a resting place. Trails from all directions intersected at Nacogdoches. Men from distant places met here, lingered awhile in the languorous sunshine, gathered in the gambling halls to try their fortunes, lingered over the bars with tales of adventure, talked of hardships and dreamed of plenty, or met in the wagonyards and formed little companies for further wanderings. Here came men who fomented war and men who pleaded for peace. In Teal's Tavern, a famous old hostelry, had been hatched plot and counter-plot. Here Houston had come, headed westward for Bexar on some mysterious mission, and here, upon his return, he had been asked to become a citizen. A man of keen vision, it was in old Nacogdoches that he first saw the bright star of Texas rising.

The early Spanish settlers, with a fine eye for climate and the things that make life tolerable, had established the town as a military post. As the years rolled on, and they found nothing about which to be scrupulously military, they built a church, comfortable homes, encouraged trade, and settled themselves to the peaceful business of living as elegantly as small labor would warrant.

In time, American adventurers and colonists, tiring of the westward trek, settled here. Only men of purpose or those who held life lightly, rode on. There were too many hazards westward for any save the dauntless. Many of the Mexicans were unfriendly and roving bands of border ruffians made life miserable and unsafe for any group of travelers appreciably less numerous than their own. The country to the east, across the Redlands, was wild enough, and free enough, but to the west and southwest, across the limitless prairie, was a land where every man who entered it lived or died, profited or starved, was fearless or filled with fear, each as was his merit.

People back in the States thought Nacogdoches to be a good way beyond the edge of civilization. Even the seasoned man, schooled in the hardships of open country, was willing to admit that it was somewhere near the edge of comparative safety.

The town was a magnet and a melting pot. Whoever stayed too long found it difficult to leave. The sunshine, the soft nights, the wind that came out of the south at evening, the liquid music of stringed instruments strummed passionately under a moon so close that it seemed to be held aloft by the belfry on the old mission, the sound of voices along the leaf-dappled walks

under the trees—these things entered the hearts of men and stayed their wanderings.

The people of Nacogdoches were a strange, mixed crew. Down east Yankee; Kentucky and Tennessee mountaineers; gentlemen adventurers from Virginia and Carolina; hard-bitten settlers from Missouri, Georgia, and Alabama; Mexican, Spaniard, Indian, breed; drunkard and gambler; killer and priest; dullard and wit; the blue blood and the bad blood; the pure and the mixed; women who had come into this far country meekly following the men they loved, and women who followed the trails of men but loved none—these were the people of Nacogdoches.

A newcomer from the States was doubly welcome. He would have news for all. The people of the town never questioned a stranger, but they welcomed him the more warmly if he offered news. If he said little, they pressed him none but formed their own opinions of that man. An honest man with an honest past, they reasoned, would not be afraid to talk. If he held his tongue it was because he feared it would betray him. So, an honest man was made welcome and all men tolerated. It was a town of wide tolerance.

Here, late one March evening, came riding James Bowie with a little cavalcade of four newcomers from the States. As they had ridden throughout the long day so they entered the town, Bowie and Summers leading, Buell riding alongside the sick and feverish Bullard, while Roundtree brought up the rear, talking to himself or singing tuneless snatches from old songs.

"That's the old Stone Fort over yonder," Bowie said,

pointing out a structure none too war-like in appearance. "The Mexican Government kept a garrison there until the citizens kicked them out."

Summers nodded without comment. During the day's ride he had learned that Bowie selected his own subjects of conversation. When Summers directed questions concerning the possibility of revolution, Bowie looked his thoughts but kept his tongue. He was particularly silent concerning his reason for being beyond the Sabine, but at the ferry Summers had heard him talking in low tones with the ferryman and gathered that he had been to Natchitoches on some mission. He had also heard the ferryman ask, "What did Houston say?" but Bowie's answer was low and indistinct. Doubtless Bowie was working in the cause of Independence and was too shrewd to put his head in a noose by talking too freely with strangers—especially close-mouthed strangers who had offered no words to show their stand.

"You will be asked a heap of questions here," Bowie said as they clattered into the street leading to Teal's Tavern. "This town has been divided against itself ever since the Government began breaking the provisions of the Constitution of 1824. You'll hear a lot of talk on both sides and they'll try to find out which side you are on."

"You haven't," Summers countered.

Bowie chuckled. "Shucks! I don't have to. You've come here looking for trouble, or I miss my guess. Well, you'll find it 'fore the year's out, or I miss another guess. If you want to catch up with the skunk that shot your brother, I advise you to keep a still tongue around here.

Wouldn't Winters be as good a name as Summers—for a spell?"

Summers looked at him with eyes that spoke his appreciation.

"Yes," he answered, "and thank you for the hint. I was just going to ask you to guard your tongue."

Again Bowie chuckled. "Mr Winters, if Jim Bowie ever started talking he'd get half the men in Texas shot 'fore sundown."

3

At the hitchrack in front of the inn they dismounted, stiffly. A negro boy took the horses and led them around into the stable yard behind the tavern. Half a dozen men greeted Bowie warmly and extended welcome to every member of the little cavalcade. Whoever rode with James Bowie was welcome in Nacogdoches.

The moment they entered the tavern Lon and Abel made a rush for the bar, followed by Buell.

"The sick man knows something about medicine," Bowie commented to Summers. "Have a drink?"

"No, thanks. You join them."

Summers walked across the big room to the crude desk at the far end. The attendant was bald, florid, and beaming with the inquisitive eagerness of one who waits for news.

"You're welcome, stranger," he said. "My name's Crews. Baldy Crews. What might your name be?"

"How do you do, Mr Crews," Summers evaded. "Can you accommodate my party?"

"Shore. Might I ask where you're from?"

Summers turned and looked across to the bar where Abel stood holding aloft a glass as he voiced a loud toast in appreciation of the splendors and glories of Tennessee.

Summers turned to Crews with a faint smile. "I hear that Mr Roundtree is from Tennessee. Perhaps that is as good as any."

The man started to ask another question but saw that the smile had vanished. In its place were thin, firm lips. The eyes were uninformative.

"Shore," he said quickly. "Tennessee's fine. A sight of folks come here from there. Et yet, Mr—er—Mr——"

"No—nor recently. One of my friends is sick. He would like to have a room to himself, if that can be arranged."

"Shore can, though we usually bundle 'em in thicker than that. Two to the bed and more if necessary. Which one is sick?"

"The one in the brown beaver."

"Him?" Crews was skeptical. "He drinks hearty."

"He does everything hearty. But he has a fever."

"A fever? Say, now! If he's got a fever you'd better be doin' somethin' about it. Come acrost Arkansas Territory?"

"Yes."

"That's it! It's the bile fever, shore as shootin'! You ketch it over in the swamps and canebrakes. But you've come to a good place. This town is healthier than all the rest of Texas throwed together. If a man dies here

'fore he's a hundred it's because he's had an accident. A man here don't begin to have children's diseases until he's well past sixty. A fellow from England was visitin' here last week and wrote a piece for the paper and said the climate here was the most salubrious in the world. A lot of the boys was for waitin' on him but about that time somebody found out what salubrious meant. Well, sir, he had it right. That's just what it is. It'll fix up bile fever quicker than anything. And there's a woman here who's a right smart hand at nursin' the bile fever if you ain't too particular about her past. She's pulled through many a one. But," he looked around and bent nearer, "but she runs the roulette wheel here and she ain't got much of a reputation. You don't want to ask too many questions."

"I don't ask questions," Summers answered pointedly. "We have no need of a nurse. There is a doctor in our party."

"Makes no difference! Red Ruth's better'n he is if he hasn't had experience with the bile fever. She's always called in. You better get him to bed and let me send her to his room with some broth or something."

"Thank you, that would be fine. But I know my friend. He won't give up until he has to be carried. Besides, he's afraid of women. If he has strength enough to drink I think he can still sit up to eat. All we ask is a chance."

Crews took the hint and hustled off to the kitchen. Twenty minutes later the five hungry men were seated at a dinner which Abel declared was a great deal better than he ever expected to find in Texas. The whiskey had

warmed his spirit and enlarged his vision. Also, it appeared to have increased his appetite.

After supper Bullard went to his room and to bed, promising to take two more of the large pills which Jeff had given him. But from the sly wink which he gave Abel, Summers knew that Lon would fight the fever with the strength of his body rather than with pills.

Summers, Buell, Abel and Bowie strolled into the crowded lobby. A dozen tables were filled with men playing cards. Over in one corner a roulette wheel was receiving a heavy play. The croupier was a woman—an Amazon if ever there was one—and above the din of the crowded room rose her voice, intoning the time worn ritual, "Round and round the little ball goes . . ."

Abel joined the crowd pressing around the wheel. Bowie passed over to the bar to talk with an old acquaintance. Summers and Buell took chairs and sat watching the throng that milled back and forth between the tables, the wheel and the bar. There were several women in the crowd. One of them was trying to drag a drunken plainsman away from a table where they were playing Old Sledge. From a dance hall directly across the street came the sound of a rasping violin and the throaty, raucous voice of the caller. "Ladies to the center and gents to the wall . . . Now gents to the center and balance all . . ." Someone, with mighty hands, was beating juba.

"Quite a lively town," Jeff said to Summers. "Just look at the types. See that Mexican playing at the wheel? I've been watching him. He's a handsome cuss."

The man indicated was dressed in the height of Spanish fashion. Lace cuffs on his sleeves increased the femininity of his small, artistic hands, but there was masculine strength to his shoulders. He played easily, smilingly, and with seeming unconcern. He won more often than the other players, and when he lost he waved the stakes away with a bantering laugh.

Bowie had come back from the bar and stood at Summers' side, watching the games with quiet interest.

"Who is that man?" Summers asked him, indicating with a nod the flashily dressed Mexican playing at the roulette wheel.

"Señor Francisco Cortina," Bowie answered in a low voice.

"He is rather careless with his money," Buell said.

Bowie edged nearer. "Yes, he is careless with it because he never earned an honest dollar in his life. He is not playing at that game for money, but for what he can hear. He claims he is a Republican, but he does this when he is with Republicans. He's a sly fox—blows hot and cold. If you ask me, he is an agent of Santa Anna's. The Government is anxious to keep the department of Nacogdoches in the peace party, and Cortina's ears are large."

"Just who is the war party, Mr Bowie?" Buell asked.

Bowie glanced around furtively. It was evident that he was embarrassed by Buell's none too guarded question. Before he could frame an answer a woman's voice caused Buell and Summers to turn in their chairs. It was the woman who, a few minutes before, had been acting as croupier at the wheel.

"Bowie will not answer that," the woman said, "but I will. Sam Houston is the war party."

"You talk nonsense!" Bowie rebuked her. "Get on back to your wheel and keep your tongue out of politics."

Summers kept his eyes on her. She was a big, strong woman, with a type of mature beauty that had the appearance of permanency. She was somewhere near thirty—a woman who had followed the trails of men and loved none. But her soft voice and manner of speaking marked her as one who had been schooled in the finer graces. Her hair was red, her features well chiseled, and there was a certain quality of character in her face. Summers thought it strange that such a woman would be a follower of the gambling halls.

"Why do you say Houston is the war party?" Buell asked her.

Summers gave him a look to shut him off. Bowie, growling, moved away.

"Because it is the truth," the woman answered.

"Sometimes the truth gets one into trouble," Summers cautioned.

The woman laughed tauntingly. "Imagine Red Ruth worrying about trouble. I am the one person in Nacogdoches who is not afraid to speak the truth."

"What makes you say Houston is the war party?" Buell repeated his question.

"I know him, sir. He passed through here two years ago on some strange mission to Bexar.* Some say he

*San Antonio de Bexar was commonly called Bexar by the American colonists. Houston, at the instance of President Jackson, made a trip to Bexar in January, 1832. He was accompanied on this trip by James Bowie, who held a large tract of land near that town. Prior to this

was sent by Jackson to form a treaty with the Indians. Others hold that he was trying to incite the Cherokees to open hostility."

"And what do you say, Madam?"

"Can it be that anyone would be interested in what Red Ruth has to say? But I have been here at Teal's several years and I have seen and heard a great deal. Many a plot has been hatched under this roof. Houston came here, and he won over many of the people. They asked him to become a citizen. When he returned from Bexar he accepted the invitation and took up residence here for a while."

"And wasn't he peaceful enough?" Summers challenged. "Have you forgotten that he was chairman of the constitutional convention at San Felipe?"

"No, nor have I forgotten that although he was the chairman of that committee he put it up to poor Austin to carry the report of their action to a hostile government. Do you see anything in that?"

Summers glanced around, uneasily. "You interest me," he said, "but this is a poor place to talk such matters. Surely he has friends here."

"Friends? Yes, many friends. Did you ever see him,

journey, Houston had been living with the Indians in Arkansas Territory. Jackson, in sending Houston to Bexar, made it known that the object of the mission was to look into the complaints of the Mexican government as to the actions of the Indians who had crossed over into Mexican territory. But Houston's report to Jackson would indicate that his real object was to sense the temper of the colonists, appraise the land, and furnish Jackson with a comprehensive report which might lead to the purchase of Texas by the United States. In any case it marked Houston's first entry into Texas and furnished his enemies with ground for their contention that he was plotting a conquest of empire.

sir? . . . No? Well, he is a striking figure. Men follow him because he is a giant and a born leader. But it is about time someone was speaking the truth, openly. If things go on this way the country will face war, and I hate war. I was orphaned by the war of 1812 and thrown into the arms of relatives unwilling to receive me. To-night I am—well, just Red Ruth, a—a woman of the gambling halls of Nacogdoches. But I know this much: If war comes to Texas it will mean more orphans and widows—many more. Houston, like many other men, talks loudly about freedom and independence and forgets it is the women and children who pay the price.”

Jefferson Buell had been listening intently. This was no ordinary woman, no matter what she said of herself.

“Just what is back of all this trouble?” he asked. “I am like Abel, Will. I can’t make it out.”

“Nor can half the people living here,” Ruth answered. “The real truth is this: Texas is too rich a plum to escape the eyes of the ambitious. Mexico first invited colonists here because she thought they would form a bulwark between her borders and the raids of hostile Indian tribes. The colonists came and found a garden spot. Then Aaron Burr cast greedy, ambitious eyes in this direction. Later Heyden Edwards had a dream too large for a little man. The Mexican Government, becoming suspicious, began quartering troops in the various departments. There was but one man who kept faith with them, even after they broke many of the provisions of the Constitution of 1824.”

“You mean Austin?” Summers asked.

“Yes, Austin. Now he is lying in jail, but he keeps

the faith. Jackson made a mistake when he sent Poinsette and Butler with offers of purchase. Mexico was smart enough to know that if the United States wanted it, then it must be worth keeping. Next Houston came—a friend of Jackson's. Do you see anything in that? And where did he come from?" She paused, waiting for an answer or for the question to take effect. "He came from living with the Indians," she continued. "The Indians call him 'Big Drunk.' Having made a wreck of his life, he is trying to beat back."

"Surely that is laudable, Madam," Buell said.

"Of course. But let him climb the stairs where he fell. He is dreaming the same dream that ruined Burr. It will ruin him."

"Or make Texas," Summers retorted.

"I might have known you were of the war party," Ruth flared.

"How could you know that?"

"Didn't you come riding into town with James Bowie? So did Houston. Whoever rides with Bowie knows——"

"Madam! I assure you I have known the man a short twenty-four hours. He joined us in camp beyond the Sabine."

"What was he doing beyond the Sabine? Did you ask him? No! Well, I can tell you. He comes from a meeting with Houston, who is somewhere over in Arkansas or Louisiana waiting for the hour. Bowie will feel out things here and go back to him in a few days."

"You are wrong there," Summers told her. "He rides to San Felipe day after to-morrow."

She looked around quickly and laid a hand on Will's arm. "Hush! Not so loud. There are some who would like to find him riding alone."

"Then you like him enough to protect him?" Summers asked, lowering his voice.

"Who does not? He growls at me because—because I am only Red Ruth and he thinks my tongue too long. He knows that I know too much. If he is going to San Felipe, then he is carrying some word from Houston to Judge Williamson. I told you that Houston was the war party. Actually it is Houston, Bowie, Williamson and Travis. They are brave, good men, but it is a forlorn hope. The Mexican government isn't blind, and it has plenty of paid assassins who would be glad to find Bowie riding alone on the prairies."

"You can rest a little easier," Summers said. "Two of us are going with him. Is there anyone here who would seek his life?"

Ruth nodded toward Cortina, who was still playing at the wheel. "There is one. But he fears Bowie's rifle—and that dreadful knife. And there are others."

"Who?" Summers pursued.

Ruth shook her head. "Ask him. He knows."

"But he might not."

"Oh, yes he does! I'll warrant he was glad enough to have you with him in crossing the Redlands—though God knows he isn't afraid of the devil. But if you want to hear him growl, just ask him how he would like to use that knife of his on Claude Gant."

Jeff Buell sucked in his breath with a sharp sound. Summers pressed his knee against Buell's.

"Gant," he repeated musingly. "It seems I have heard that name before."

"You will hear it again before you leave Texas. He has been the head of a band of border ruffians for two or three years, but he is too slick to get anything fastened on him. When things get too hot he disappears."

"Is he a Texan?" Summers asked.

"God knows what he is! Some Spanish blood, I think. He carries off the role of gentleman well enough."

"You know him?"

"Oh, yes! He used to come here quite often. But he won't show up here again. Nor anywhere else in Texas—alone."

Again Summers stared Buell into silence. "Is he a land holder?" he asked, pursuing the questioning with as much indifference as he could command.

"Yes. He holds a large grant down near Bexar, close to Bowie's place, but he is playing for higher stakes than one little grant of land. At one time, when it was to his advantage, he was an Austin man. Santa Anna bought him—body and soul. He is on the side where he thinks he can find the most feathers for his own nest. If you ever meet him you will know him for a man who plays for all or nothing."

"I should like to meet him," Jeff said with a quiet reserve. "I, too, like to play for high stakes."

Ruth studied his face for a moment. "Gant isn't interested in cards," she said. "He is playing a game of empire."

"Oh, I see!" Jeff said, and giving Summers a quick look, arose from his chair. "I have been interested in

what you have had to say, Madam. You seem to know more about affairs here than any man I have met so far. I would like to talk more, but one of the men who came with us is sick with a fever and I must go to see if he is sleeping well. Coming with me, Will?"

"Yes, in just a minute." He turned to the woman as Jeff walked away. "Are you the woman Mr Crews says is such a fine hand with the sick?"

She laughed. "*He* thinks so. I pulled him through once. Nearly everyone sends for me when they get sick, but they forget all about me when they are well."

Summers drew a step nearer. "As I told you, I am going on with Bowie. One of my dearest friends is sick, and I must leave him in the care of that man who just left us. He is a doctor, but somehow I would feel a little better about it if he had the care of someone who has a reputation for being a good hand in fever cases. I want you to promise me to step in and help if he gets worse. And I promise you that *I* won't forget."

"I'll help if they ask for me," she said. "The forgetting part doesn't matter. I'm used to that."

"Can I ask you one other question—in strict confidence?"

"Of course."

"Do you know where this man Gant is now?"

"No, I don't."

"Is there any chance of his coming here?"

"No, no! It's too dangerous—for him."

"If you wanted to find him," Summers pursued, "where would you look?"

The woman studied this for a minute. "In Mexico, probably. If he is in Texas, he won't come east of Bexar."

"Thank you. You will say nothing of my interest in the matter?"

"No. If you want to know more, talk to Bowie. I'm sure he would like to find him."

Summers turned away and went to Bullard's room. Jeff was just coming out, closing the door quietly behind him.

"He's asleep," Jeff whispered. "That's one good sign."

"How sick is he?" Summers asked as they walked along the hall to their room.

"I think he will be all right in a few days," Jeff answered.

"See here, Jeff, that wasn't my question. Do you know just what is wrong?" Something in Summers' voice betrayed his lack of confidence in Jeff's skill.

They had reached their room and Jeff flung himself into a chair. Summers thought he seemed a little petulant.

"Do you know just what is wrong?" he repeated.

"No, Will, I don't. Isn't that just my luck! The first patient I get has something I don't know much about. But I don't think it's serious."

"We can't take any chances. I want you to get that woman, who calls herself Red Ruth, to help nurse him. They tell me she is a fine hand with the fever."

"*That* woman! Why, she is——"

"Never mind what she is!" Summers rebuked him. "She can help, and that's something. Lon is your first

patient in your new country, Jeff. See that you cure him. His sickness brings me face to face with questions of duty and obligation. Bowie says that Jim's wife is in San Felipe. She can't have much money and she has the care of her three children. I know how to get back her land, but how could she use it? None of the children are old enough to help. She is my charge, Jeff."

"I know," Jeff answered with sympathetic understanding. "How can you get back the land?"

"Leave that to me. In one way it is just as well for me to go on with Bowie. He knows the trails, and I should be back here, with Mary, in two or three weeks. You and Lon can wait here for me."

"What about my search? What about Gant?" Jeff asked, frowning. He was forever having to fan his anger, for Jeff was one whose heart could know deep sorrow and genuine sympathy, but to keep the fire of wrath burning he had to nurse it.

Summers laid a hand on his shoulder. "Listen, Jeff. My first duty is to my brother's widow. We understood that when we left Washington. Vengeance must give way to duty. As my friend, your duty is to serve friendship and get Lon back on his feet."

"And then?"

"One problem at a time, Jeff. I'll help you find Gant just as soon as I can get Mary established, though the Lord only knows just how I'll do it."

"What about Lon and Abel?"

"Lon will take up land. Abel will go where I go. I'm not worried about them. But I am worried about

you, Jeff, and about Carolin. You have been away three months now, and the end is not yet in sight."

Buell sat staring at the floor. "I wrote her a long letter from Little Rock, when we stopped there," he said. "Poor Sis! She won't ever understand just why I left her there."

"You'll write her again—from here?" Summers asked.

"Will you?" Jeff countered.

Summers turned away and walked the length of the room. "No, Jeff," he answered at last. "We've talked that all over before. Since she doesn't know the truth back of your sudden departure, doubtless she blames it on me. But you know, and I know. There is nothing I can ever say—to her."

Jeff came over and stood by him at the window. "Don't be a fool, Will. I've told you a dozen times that you are wrong. I know Carolin and I know her heart. One word from you would bring her here."

"To this? Carolin here—in this country? No! I wouldn't have it that way, even if I could. Besides, I have a big enough problem facing me now. But you must write her—often."

"Of course. And after I find Gant, and get settled somewhere, I'm sure she will come."

"I'm afraid you won't find him so easily. That woman, Red Ruth, just told me she doubted whether he could be found in Texas."

"In Texas or in hell, I'll find him!" Jeff retorted, and glared at Summers.

"All right, Jeff. But duty comes first. Your first job is to get Lon back in shape. If you have any reason

to take someone into your confidence, you'll find Lon mighty close-lipped."

Jeff shook his head. "I can never tell anyone, Will. Not even my own sister. The only monument I can ever give poor Sally is just—silence."

4

The next morning Summers sought out Bowie and told him he would like to examine the records of land titles in the old Edwards Colony.

"They're kept by the alcalde," Bowie told him, "and like I told you yesterday, some of them are mixed pretty bad. It hasn't been but a few years since Austin ordered the records kept."

"But surely the record will show who holds my brother's land."

"Yes, I reckon so. We'll go over to Reug's store and see Henry. If anybody can help, he can. Is your name Summers or Winters?"

"Winters—for the time being."

"All right. Henry Reug will take you to see the alcalde. Henry can find out what you want to know."

"I can find out myself, if I can see the record," Summers said. "I am a lawyer, you know."

Bowie eyed him for a long minute. "No, I didn't know," he said. "And if I was you I wouldn't say anything about it. We've got a little suspicious of new lawyers drifting in from the States. You look like a woodsman. All the lawyers I ever saw wear different clothes from what you do. But if you are a lawyer,

you don't need Henry. Go right to the alcalde. Here, come out on the street and I'll show you his office."

Summers followed. Bowie pointed out the low, squat building. Then he turned and pointed out the mercantile store of Reug and Roberts.

"Come there when you get through," he said. "I want to buy some things before we start out to-morrow—including a new hat."

The alcalde was a pleasant man and offered his regrets that the records were not complete in all cases.

"I want to see who holds title to the land that was once owned by a James Summers," Will told him.

"Oh, that! Well, you see there was quite a mix up on that piece of land. They proved that Edwards had no right to grant it to Summers; that it belonged to a Mexican named Farias. I think it was a fixed up affair, but the government always backs the Mexican. Summers went about defending his title in the wrong way and got shot for his pains."

"Yes, I heard about that," Summers said, as casually as possible. "His widow was ousted, I understand."

"There wasn't anything else to do," the alcalde defended. "Some time after she was put off the land, Farias sold out to a lawyer named Crenshaw, who had helped him establish his claim."

"I see. Where does Crenshaw live now?"

"Down at Washington, I hear. Things were getting too hot for him in this department. He wasn't here more than a year and a half and was always at the bottom of some trouble. Are you interested in that piece of land?"

"Yes. May I see the record?"

"Of course."

The records showed a transfer from Farias to Crenshaw for a consideration of two hundred dollars. Summers felt sure that the consideration was purely fictitious. Borrowing paper and a pen from the alcalde, he sat down and wrote out a deed, describing the property by the metes and bounds set out in the record. He named himself as grantee and Crenshaw as grantor. The consideration he placed at one dollar. Folding the deed carefully, he placed it in his pocket, thanked the alcalde for his courtesies and went back down the street toward Reug's store. It was a morning of warm sunshine. A negro slave boy, driving cows down the street, was singing:

"Rose, Rose, my coal-black Rose!

I nebber see a nigger dat I lub lak Rose . . ."

Summers smiled. If a slave boy, following cows, had the heart to sing, then surely a freeman should be of light heart—especially now that Fate was delivering up the enemy. Softly he began humming the song of the negro boy, though his thoughts and his heart conjured up pictures strangely out of harmony with the song.

"Rose, Rose, my coal-black Rose!

I nebber see a nigger dat I lub lak Rose . . ."

5

At dawn the following morning Bowie, Summers and Roundtree mounted their horses and clattered through the

empty streets of the town. Each man carried a four days' supply of rations in his saddle bags and Bowie was wearing a large, fawn colored Vicksburger which he had purchased at Reug's. At the edge of the town they took up the old road to Bexar, expecting to hold it until they crossed the Trinity. On the west bank of the Trinity they would leave the Bexar road to the north and swing southwest along a less clearly defined trail leading to Washington.

Bowie, mounted on a fiery mustang, set the pace. It was soon evident that he intended to put as many miles behind him as horses and men could stand. Roundtree, for once, did not lag behind. He was getting a quiet enjoyment out of his mental pictures of what would happen once they reached Washington. It was the first real objective he had had since leaving Tennessee. Summers and Buell had kept their own counsel, but now at least one cat was out of the bag. There was nothing to be gained by lagging behind when there was fun ahead. Then, too, he was suspicious of this open, sparsely settled country. Three men were better than one any time. There were far too many opportunities for ambush, especially in the bottom lands where the tall, thick canebrakes reduced the road to little more than a trail. So Pete was encouraged to keep the pace, and there was no complaining.

But it did seem to Abel that the world was made up of silent men. This man Bowie had little to say. Twice during the morning he pointed out the home of a settler, giving the name and a brief history, and then again lapsed into silence.

At noon they made their first halt on the banks of a small creek. The horses were watered and hobbled and Bowie soon had a small fire burning. Game had been sighted all along the road, but they had made no effort to secure it. The bacon which they carried in the saddle bags was a welcome change from a long enforced diet of fresh meat.

The business of preparing the noonday meal was a matter which each man took care of for himself. Bacon strips, impaled on green sticks and held over the fire, constituted all the art of cookery that one need know.

After they had finished the simple meal, and while they were giving the horses an hour's needed rest, Summers decided it was time to win added confidence by giving Bowie some concrete facts concerning his presence in Texas. The recital was unvarnished and stripped of all color and unnecessary detail. He glossed over the two years spent in Washington, including it only for the purpose of establishing his right to the claim of being a lawyer. He made it clear that his first mission was the reestablishment of the rights of his brother's widow, following which he would take up land. Throughout the talk he steered clear of the political situation, but held the secret hope that his frankness would cause Bowie to talk.

Bowie listened attentively and when Summers had finished, said:

"There's land a-plenty here, as you can see, but before winter comes Texas will be in arms. We've stood about all we can, and the pot's boiling." He hesitated for a moment, studying Summers' face for any sign that

would betray his inner feelings. Abel's interest was in a grass rope which he was twisting with a forked stick. "It is a question of liberty or slavery," Bowie went on. "Which side are you on?" He put the question with a directness that tore down all barriers of suspicion and reserve.

"If I were a Texan there would be but one choice," Summers answered. "Which side are you on?"

"Red Ruth had it about right," Bowie answered. "I belong to the war party. I reckon I can talk pretty freely with a man who will ride as far as you have to take care of his brother's wife. In San Felipe you'll meet Judge Williamson—Three-Legged Willie, we call him—and he's boiling over now to start things. Travis is just waiting for a chance. Houston is the biggest duck in the puddle and he'll come at the right time."

"He sorta petered out over in our state," Abel commented.

Bowie glanced at him shrewdly. "He won't peter out here," he said.

"You know him?" Summers asked.

"Yes. Don't you?"

"I never met him. Where is he now?"

"Handy," Bowie said succinctly as he arose and began packing his saddle bag. "We'd better be moving. I want to make Smith's to-night, over near the head of Hurricane Creek."

"Who is that woman Red Ruth?" Summers asked as they were saddling the horses.

"The Lord knows!" Bowie answered. "For one thing she is the best game keeper in Nacogdoches, and she's

got a better hand with sick folks than any of the doctors. Nobody has anything to do with her until somebody in the family gets sick. Then they send for Red Ruth. People are funny that way. Some say her father was a rich planter down New Orleans way, but I come from Louisiana myself and I never heard of her until she turned up in Nacogdoches."

"She told me she was made an orphan by the war of 1812."

"Yes, that's her story, and it's all you'll ever get."

"She has plenty of sense," Summers commented.

"Too damn much!" Bowie growled. "She knows all that's going on in Texas—and what she doesn't know she guesses. Ready?"

They swung into the saddles and again took up the trail; Bowie and Summers leading, abreast, and Abel following close behind. Leaving the bottom land on the creek they climbed out onto a broad expanse of prairie. The grass, warmed by a month of sunshine and soft rains, was tall enough to ripple under the unsteady gusts of wind from the south-west. Against this background of green, thousands of flowers fought with the grass for their little hour of glory. Here and there, where the grass had lost in the fight, were triumphant splotches of solid color. If the horses turned from the trail their heedless hoofs beat down hundreds of flowers. At such times the grass, resentful of this interference in an age old feud, hissed its defiance against the hoofs and legs of the heedless horses. Both grass and flowers fought for the soil bordering the road and here and there some bold flower lifted itself from a rut in the trail.

Meadowlarks swarmed the prairies. Intoxicated by spring, they trilled their cheery songs with such an ecstasy that all other bird notes were quite drowned out. The grass, the flowers, and the good green smell of earth, were enough to stir Abel into tuneless song. He lifted his voice bravely. And bachelor though he was, and fearful of women, his song had something to do with love.

Spring is a great magician.

Under cover of Abel's high-pitched chant, Summers said to Bowie:

"I wonder if you happen to know a Texan named Gant?"

Bowie wheeled in his saddle and studied Summers face, trying to determine whether he spoke of a friend. He decided to be cautious, but his growl gave him away.

"Yes, I know him." Unconsciously his hand sought the handle of his long knife. Summers saw the movement and smiled. He decided to taunt Bowie into words.

"Friend of yours?" he asked.

"Not by a long shot!" Bowie retorted. "You know him?"

"I met him back in Washington."

"Oh, ho! So that's where he's been? When did you see him there?"

Summers evaded the direct question. "He left there in December," he answered. "I understand he sailed for the mouth of the Brazos."

Bowie shook his head. "He may have told you that, but he never landed there. He went on to Mexico to report to Santa Anna. He is a spy and a traitor to the

cause of his own countrymen. He will never have the nerve to set foot in Texas again unless he is with the Mexican army. There are too many who would like to slit his throat."

"Indeed!" Summers answered, assuming surprise. "What for?"

Bowie did not answer at once. He rode along, absently twirling the ends of his bridle reins. Cautious thought displaced the scowl on his dark face.

"Well, Mr Summers," he said at last, "there is such a thing as talking too much in Texas just now. All I can say is that I'd like to run across Gant."

"So would I," Summers replied with an earnestness Bowie could not well mistake.

"When you find him," Bowie answered, "you'll find him with the Mexican army—and I hope I see him first." Again Bowie lapsed into silence.

Abel was still in contest with the shrill tremolo of the meadowlarks.

6

At dusk they came to Smith's place on the headwaters of Hurricane Creek, and were warmly welcomed. The house, made of logs, was typical of the plainsman. Two large, square rooms were separated by an open passageway, the rooms being joined by a roof which extended over this opening. This roof-covered passage was used as a sort of catch-all for harness, yokes and tools. Three long-eared coon hounds sprawled sleepily in the dust of the passageway, and a fourth was busy with his fleas.

One of the rooms was used as a kitchen and dining room; the other room across the passage served as a bedroom for a family of five. A second bedroom, above this, could be reached by climbing a ladder near the cat and clay chimney at the end of the room.

Immediately upon the arrival of the three riders, the woman of the house set about preparing a second supper. In this she was helped by a daughter who seemed glad enough to escape the presence of three strange men. The two bushy-headed boys, just in their teens, quite forgot their unfinished chores and took up seats in the dark recess by the fireplace. To them, this was an event. Tales would be told. There would be news; there would be rumors; and perchance these two tall men from Tennessee would spin yarns of their prowess in an effort to match Bowie's fame. Silent, beady-eyed, these two boys, half hidden in the shadows of their corner, looked on like blinking ferrets just coming out of a hole.

Supper was soon ready. Though simple, it was plentiful. There was fried ham and thin brown gravy; crackling corn bread and thick sorghum; potatoes with their skins baked to a crisp in the coals on the kitchen fireplace, and a large dish of hominy, warmed over and made more appealing by the use of ham gravy.

"It ain't much," Smith apologized when they were seated, "but I reckon you can git along fer one night on what we hafta eat the year round. And since we've already et, you can fall to without havin' to hold back."

The tall, gaunt wife and the timid daughter waited on the hungry riders. Bowie and Smith kept up the conversation. Abel put his mind to his business. Sum-

mers took no part in the talk. In fact, he did not hear it. The sight of this tall, thin, tired-looking woman carried him back to a certain night in Washington when he had heard Carolin say, "I have seen some of those pioneer women and it just made my heart sick. They were tired, wan, hungry, and their eyes were filled with longing."

Summers studied the woman's face. It was set as a flint. Yes, she was brave. She had courage. She was equal to the demands of the hour. But in her eyes there was hunger and longing, just as Carolin had said, hunger for the things she could never have, longing for the things she had once dreamed of. Summers wondered if the husband ever saw that look.

The thought smote him in the heart. For the first time he began to realize that maybe he had shattered his own dream. Why had he taken exception to the thought that a woman who had enjoyed better things would ever want to come to this? After all, why had he taken such pride in being a woodsman? Why should he have taken exception to Gant's statement that he was only a woodsman trying to beat back? Merciful Heavens! who would not want to beat back?

So this was part of what lay at the end of the sun's road? It was to this that Jim had brought his wife. It was to this that Prudence Ransome had gone, following blindly on the heels of John Summers. Would the clan of Summers never offer more than log cabins to their women? Did they know love?

He pushed back his plate, all appetite gone. How long is the road traveled by a fool!

Presently the sound of words broke his train of thought.

"Yes, it's gettin' thicker settled every day," Smith was saying to Bowie. "It's gettin' so a man's afraid to shoot a deer fer fear he'll miss and kill somebody. When I come here there wasn't but two houses between here and Nacogdoches. Now look! I got two neighbors within six mile of me. I bin thinkin' about clearin' out and goin' on farther west where there's more breathin' room."

Summers looked at the woman. He saw her eyelids fall and thought he heard a faint sigh. Again he heard Carolin saying, "I never heard of a woman urging a man to go into new country."

Of course Smith would go on, and the woman would follow. In time their two beady-eyed boys would marry timid girls and pursue the quest of the sun's road. They would reduce the wilderness, conquer the prairies, and a thousand new blood red flowers would bloom along trails where women's hearts had bled . . .

That night, in the attic bedroom under the eaves, Summers slept fitfully. There was a time when this sort of thing would have seemed quite good enough for anyone. Now he knew of better things. This was a far cry from the luxuries of Washington.

Down in the passageway one of the hounds kept beating his leg against the wall as he battled with his fleas.



Chapter Two

RED RUTH AND A MAN AFRAID

I

TWO DAYS later, at late evening, the three riders made camp within a few miles of Washington, on the east bank of the Brazos. Bowie was for riding on into town to spend the night, but at Summers' insistence he agreed to the halt. After supper Summers decided to take Bowie into his confidence in the matter of how he intended to handle Crenshaw. He had already outlined the plan to Abel, who had approved of it with gusto. Bowie listened and smiled broadly at the prospect. Now he could understand why Summers had not wanted to go on into town. Much depended upon the element of surprise.

The delay had one other marked advantage for Summers. His story and his plan of action went a long way in increasing Bowie's confidence. At any rate it loosened his tongue. That night, for the first time, Bowie talked without reserve, sketching dramatically and pungently the background of the internal disturbances and wrongs that were slowly but surely driving the colonists to open rebellion.

At eight in the morning, a purposely late start, they were again on their way. Within an hour they had reached the edge of the town. Abel now rode alongside, or a little ahead. Twice during the ride he had

declared that both he and his horse were feeling like colts.

Coming to the center of the town, Bowie pointed out Crenshaw's office. At a hitchrack a little beyond they dismounted and tied their horses.

Crenshaw's office was in a log structure a story and a half high. The upper part, Bowie said, was used as sleeping quarters. The street door was open.

"Wait here," Summers directed as he tied his horse. "I'll walk by the door and glance in. If he is there, I'll walk on, then turn around and give you the sign. You meet me at the door. I won't need your help, but I'll need witnesses."

Rifle in hand, he walked swiftly down the street. At the door he slowed his stride and gave the interior a side-long glance. At a pine desk sat Crenshaw, his back half turned to the door. Summers passed on a few paces, then turned and nodded to Bowie and Abel. They met him at the door.

With his rifle crotched under his arm, Summers entered. At sound of footsteps Crenshaw turned, peering over the tops of his square-rimmed glasses. Then, in surprise, he shifted the glasses higher on his nose and started to get up from the chair. His round little legs failed him. His lower jaw sagged down. Again he shifted his glasses. Surely his eyes, or the glasses, were deceiving him.

Summers poked his rifle forward menacingly, and in a voice edged with hate and barren of pity, said:

"I believe it is still my shot, Mr Crenshaw."

Crenshaw tried to speak but no words came. He ap-

peared to have lost control of his tongue. His lower jaw hung open in wordless amazement. His eyes shifted to Bowie and to Roundtree. They stood just back of Summers, as impassive as Indians. There was no comfort there. He glanced across the room to the mantel, where a rifle hung on two forked sticks. It was a long journey and he knew he could never make it. Even if his bloodless legs would carry him that far, that menacing rifle in the hands of a cold killer would speak before he had taken the second step. Past events trooped through his mind. He remembered that night in the woods when he had seen this same buckskin clad figure lift up before him and utter the same words that had just now been repeated. He remembered his panic. It came again, more devastating than before.

Summers took a step forward and Abel quietly closed the door.

Crenshaw slid out of his chair like a fat sea lion slipping over a rock to plunge into the sea. On his knees he found tongue.

"My God, Summers! Don't shoot! Don't shoot! What do you want?"

"So? You remember me well enough. And you remember the land you stole from my brother? You hadn't the courage to face me, so you got even with me through my brother."

"I didn't do that, Summers! Before God I didn't do that! You must——"

"Hold your tongue! I wouldn't believe you if you stood before God."

"But it is the truth. I swear——"

"Must I kill you, Crenshaw, to keep you from swearing to more lies?"

"It's the truth—I swear it! But I will pay you. I will pay you. See—wait!"

Crenshaw's eyes lit up with the gleam of a new hope. His fat, stubby fingers began clawing at the rough floor. They were trembling almost beyond control but at last he lifted up a short section of puncheon, neatly fitted, and drew from the dark recess a heavy black metal box.

"Here," he said, throwing open the lid and running his fingers through bank notes and coins of silver and gold. "Here is money. I will pay you. Here is over five hundred—more than the place is worth."

Summers stepped forward and kicked the box from his hands, scattering the contents over the floor. Then he jerked the frightened man to his feet and forced him back into the chair. From his own pocket he drew out the deed which he had drawn in the office of the alcalde at Nacogdoches, spread it upon the table and dipping a quill into the inkpot handed it to Crenshaw.

"Sign that!" he ordered.

Lawyer-like, Crenshaw began reading the document.

"Sign it!" Summers barked. "I've no time to waste. For your information it is a deed to my brother's land. The consideration is one dollar." He reached into his pocket, drew out a silver dollar and cast it clanking on the pine desk. "Sign it!" he said again as he jammed the end of the rifle into Crenshaw's ribs.

In Crenshaw's trembling fingers the quill pen scraped haltingly across the bottom of the deed. Summers turned to Bowie and Abel.

"Sign this—as witnesses," he said.

Abel bent low over the paper. Turning his back to cut out Crenshaw's view, he whispered to Summers:

"You guide the pen, Will. Dang you! Why didn't you shoot him before you embarrassed me this-a-way."

When the signatures were attached, Summers turned to Crenshaw.

"This is not a very legal way to get a deed, Crenshaw, but it will answer. You will never contest it, and——"

"My God! Don't shoot——"

"Shut up! Unfortunately, I haven't time to kill you. I'd be forced to stay here to explain why I did it—and I'm in a hurry. But you won't contest this deed, Crenshaw. You haven't the nerve. You know I would kill you. Texas is a big country, but it isn't big enough for both of us. I'll be back through here in a few days, with Jim's wife, and if I find you here then, so help me God I'll kill you! Remember, you still owe me one shot."

Returning the deed to his pocket, he turned and strode through the door, almost breaking into a run in an effort to overcome the burning desire to shoot Crenshaw in cold blood. So great was his anger and stress that as he walked toward the hitchrack he failed to notice that Abel had stayed behind.

The moment Summers walked through the door, followed by Bowie, Crenshaw began crawling around on hands and knees, gathering up the scattered bills. When he had collected them, Abel reached over and jerked them from his hand.

"I'll take these, Mr Crabshaw," he said. "Will's partickler, like, but I ain't so choosey. I reckon Mary and

her kids'll have use fer it. It sorter belongs to them, anyway."

Crenshaw jumped up belligerently.

"Set down!" Abel menaced him with his rifle. "And don't git keerless. The night you and Will went into them woods, I fergot to load his rifle. I thought you'd ought to know, seein' the distance you've run and the trouble it's caused you. But this gun," he patted the stock of his rifle, "is loaded, Mr Henshaw. I'm more partickler with my own gun." He stuffed the handful of bills into a pocket as he backed toward the door. At the doorway, he said: "I'm much obliged to you fer keepin' all this money fer Mary. This must be a pretty good country when a man like you can git a-holt of so much. But it's healthier now back in Tennessee, Mr Bradshaw, and the road's wide open. I advise you to take it."

He deliberately turned his back as he passed through the door.

"What have you been doing?" Summers demanded when Abel joined them at the hitchrack.

Abel made believe he was bending over a recalcitrant knot in the bridle reins. "Oh, nothin' much! I jes' stayed behind to give him a little advice."

Mounting, they rode out of the town and took up the trail leading to San Felipe.

San Felipe de Austin, the capital of the department of the Brazos, was more purely American than the town of

Nacogdoches, though somewhat smaller in population. The people of the town itself, and of the country round about, were sober, serious-minded colonists who had been lured here from the States by the reports which Austin had sent out concerning the richness and fertility of the land. The acreage, which Austin promised each settler, was far greater than they could hope to secure in their own communities.

Austin had been careful in the selection of his colonists, and the moral fiber of his grantees was higher than in any other colony. Their civil and criminal code, written by Austin's hand, was more clearly defined and more faithfully upheld. Gambling was expressly forbidden under the law; profanity and drunkenness were misdemeanors punishable by fine, and prostitution was frowned upon by a law providing for imprisonment and hard labor. San Felipe, therefore, was less colorful than Nacogdoches but infinitely more desirable for the true home-seeker. It held no allurements for the wanderer, the adventurer, the filibuster and the criminal fleeing the stern justice of his native state. The men and women of San Felipe were of high purpose.

The alcalde, Judge Williamson (Three-Legged Willie—so called because he had a wooden leg and augmented this with a rudely fashioned crutch) was a man who knew how to enforce laws by creating respect for them; who could find pleasure and conviviality and yet stop short of debauchery; and who was American enough to dream of freedom and not confuse it with a dream of empire.

It was to Williamson that Summers went the morning

he arrived in San Felipe. It was enough for Williamson that he came in company with Bowie.

Summers briefly sketched his story and gave the object of his mission, leaving out, to Abel's disgust, the episode of the meeting with Crenshaw in Washington. Williamson listened with kindly sympathy and blew his nose a little suspiciously when Summers touched lightly on the matter of his duty to his brother's wife.

"She is here, all right," Williamson told him, "and well enough taken care of. We haven't much money, but we've food and shelter, and we share that. She came down from Nacogdoches with some other colonists, bringing a wagon loaded with household goods. They tell me she drove her own wagon every step of the way. Clem Cooper had a vacant house which he turned over to her and she moved in. There's a woman for you, sir! You won't have her on your hands long."

"What do you mean?" Summers asked.

Williamson winked shrewdly. "Well, Mr Summers, women are none too plentiful in this country. Ben Petty lost his wife last fall and it's a sight the amount of stuff he's sent over to that woman since she moved in Cooper's house. We never knew Ben was so generous. She's a likely looking woman, and Petty has a mighty good farm. I'll be willing to gamble that I'll be tying a knot there before the summer passes."

"But—but Jim hasn't been dead six months," Summers protested.

Williamson sagely nodded his large head. "I know. But things are different here. It is a hard country—especially for a lone woman. Respect for the dead doesn't

fill the flour barrel. Ben is smart enough to know that, and so is she. She knows she could go farther and do worse. If I were you I'd just forget about taking her back up to Nacogdoches. Besides, you haven't any land there, have you?"

"I've just bought a place up there," Summers answered, looking hard at Abel and Bowie.

"I'd just let it lie," Williamson advised. "If you suggest going back she might hesitate to protest. Ben is a little backward and I don't think things have come to a head yet. You'd better locate here with us. There's a piece of land about a mile out of town that has been forfeited by a man who has gone back to the States. Like a good many of the others, he lost his nerve when Austin was thrown into prison. He left the whole matter with me to get what I could. I'd take it myself, but a three-legged lawyer can't do much with a farm. It has an extra large log house, story and a half, and enough good timber to build a dozen more rooms if you wanted to add on to it. The land's rich—especially good cotton land."

"I'm afraid I'll have to be content with what I have," Summers answered, "although I think I'd like it better here. I spent just about all I had for the place I bought." Again he glared at Abel. Bowie was smiling broadly at something he saw through the window.

"How much would it take to buy this place?" Abel asked. "I'm lookin' fer some land myself."

Summers eyed him suspiciously. Williamson seemed surprised. This tall, gaunt woodsman did not look like ready money.

"Have you a family, Mr Roundtree?" Williamson asked.

"No-o," slowly, "but I'm jest about to adopt one. Does a man hafta have a family to buy land here?"

"Oh, no! I was just wondering. It isn't the land that I'm offering for sale, but the improvements and the tools. The land was a grant which has been forfeited. But Austin has always sought men with families. The man who gave it up thought he ought to have something for his work—if he can get it. So do I. It is a good house, there are plenty of tools, and nearly a labor of land has been broken out at first one time and another."

"Will told me about labors, but I fergit," Abel said, scratching his head. "How much is a labor?"

"A hundred and seventy-seven acres—roughly."

"And how much land altogether?" Abel asked, assuming the air of a man who bargains cautiously.

"A sitio. That's about four thousand four hundred and twenty acres."

"God A-mighty! That's a lot! How much does he think he'd ought to git fer his tools and what he's done to improve it?"

Williamson was lawyer enough to keep his eye on a fee, but he was at a loss to size up this man.

"I think he would be tickled to death with two hundred and fifty—or three hundred dollars."

"Which?" Abel asked, curtly.

"Well—say three hundred," Williamson tried.

"I'll take it," Abel said quickly. He fished around in his pocket and drew forth a large roll of bank notes. Tossing two bills on the table, he said: "That'll bind the

bargain until I can take a look at what I've let myself in fer." He avoided Summers' eyes as he returned the roll to his pocket.

"Where did you get all that money?" Summers demanded, quite forgetting Williamson's presence.

Abel did not forget. "Now, Will, that's a personal matter. In the first place, it's none of yore business. But if you must know, I got it fer givin' a man some good advice."

3

Upon Williamson's assurance that the title grant would be taken care of in due course, Abel and Summers spent the following week in moving Mary and the three children out to the new place and in making the house habitable and home-like. Before the end of the first week, Summers was in full agreement with Williamson's estimate of Mary. There was a woman for you! She sang as she went about her work. Not for a minute did she seek sympathy by tearful recitals of her woes and tragedies. Once, when Summers unexpectedly entered the kitchen, he surprised a few tears on her cheek. She brushed them away quickly, stoutly declaring that the chimney was not drawing well and that the room was full of smoke. Summers agreed, coughing gallantly. It was not for him to destroy so brave a fiction.

There was much work to be done about the place, and it wanted doing all at once. There were endless repairs to be made; crude but substantial furniture to be fashioned by hand; many little improvements which needed

the hand of a man skilled with tools. Added to all this, the early and swift moving season demanded that the cotton land be plowed and made ready for planting.

For once Abel forgot all his ills and complaints as he plunged into the field work with a will and tireless strength that even Summers could not match. The days were long and the work hard, but when they turned from the field at night they were certain of a meal equal to their hunger and a bright-eyed welcome that more than paid them for all their toil. And after the meal there was always the romp with the two older children. James, the first born, was old enough to carry on mimic warfare with hostile bands of Indians, whom he had no difficulty in dispatching unless, for the sake of the game, he could get a more clamorous encounter by shouting for Abel to come to the rescue. This Abel always did with much stamping of feet and brandishing of a large butcher knife, scalping Indians right and left and shouting bang! bang! with such rapidity and gusto that the baby girl, Letitia, invariably took fright and burst into tears. This provided Abel with the opportunity of lifting her from the cradle and tossing her up toward the dark beams with a hearty "Ippity-iday," and so continuing until she chortled with glee. Then, sitting before the open fireplace, he would rock back and forth, singing songs made up on the spot and fitting words to a tuneless chant. Back and forth, back and forth, raced the grotesque shadows of the giant singer until all three of the drowsing little heads nodded off into the dreamless slumber of childhood.

And Mary, sitting at the spinning wheel or still busy

over household tasks that were never ended, was learning that men, even as women, can bravely carry off a duty.

4

During those two weeks when Summers and Abel were making the first moves in the readjustment of the broken threads in Mary's life, Bullard, back in Nacogdoches, lay at the door of death. He would have passed through but for the grim determination and tireless watchfulness of Red Ruth. As Crews had said to Summers, she had a better hand with the fever than most doctors. Doctors had only the science of their skill and the help of drugs; Red Ruth, being a woman, had magic.

Twenty-four hours after the departure of Summers and Abel, Buell knew that he was faced with a serious case. He knew, too, that he alone could not win. He called in Red Ruth. She came, and that night, as well as all the nights for the next three weeks, another croupier kept the wheel in the lobby below. She seemed never to need sleep, never wearied, never abandoned hope.

Bullard, at the hour when he was lowest, seemed to catch something of her determination. But to him those days were all so very hazy. There were times when he could see Jeff Buell at the side of the bed, very quiet and serious, but he never awoke or became clearly conscious but what he found that large, Titian-haired woman bending over him as she changed the cold cloths on his brow or bathed his thumping throat and wrists. He hardly knew whether he was alive or dead. If dead, then hell itself had at least one angel who busied herself with

bringing cool, wet cloths to put out the raging fires that had changed his blood streams to throbbing torrents of boiling oil.

One night, at a long last, the blood streams suddenly cooled. The fever had broken. A soft, cooling breeze came in through the open window. Voices in the street below, though they seemed miles away, were plainly audible. The countless crickets, that for days had been singing in his ears, abruptly broke off their clamoring. It was so good to feel the breeze, and the cloths stayed cool for a much longer time.

A feeling of infinite weariness and indifference came over him. It would be so easy just to drift. . . . There was a big, white cloud sailing over a billowing meadow. . . . Trees grew out of it, and in their deep shade was lush, green grass watered by a fountain. . . . He could fly up there, rest in the shade of the trees and let the spray from the fountain fall over him. . . .

But something was holding him back. Oh, yes! That woman with the bright red hair was chafing his wrists and calling his name. And a young man, with drawn face, was holding a small glass of liquid to his lips. A voice came, indistinct and far off. It was the woman speaking. She was urging him to fight. So? They did not want him to go over and sit on that cloud?

He began trying to fight back to a more sensible consciousness. He found it difficult to keep from slipping over the edge of something and flying over to that cloud. But he fought against it, and this struggle was the one spark Red Ruth needed.

An hour later Jeff and Ruth knew that the fever was

broken, the crisis passed. They had won the fight. But Ruth knew, too, that her hours of watchfulness were not yet at an end.

5

During the two or three weeks of Bullard's convalescence, Buell found quite enough to occupy his mind and his time. The child of a poor Mexican laborer lay stricken by fever and Jeff had been called to her side. The family was without funds, but their need was none the less great. Again Jeff realized that his was only the skill of the man of science. The extra needed thing was the magic of Red Ruth.

Then there occurred a gunshot case, demanding the amputation of a hand. Again Red Ruth was called in. There was no man in the household strong stomached enough to be of any help during the ordeal.

So it was that by the time Bullard was beginning to take to his feet, Buell had become so occupied with the saving of life that he had quite forgotten the burning vengeance that had brought him here. He had come seeking a life and had found the joy of saving life.

He was learning that hate and love cannot occupy the same heart.

In late April, both Buell and Lon received letters from Summers, brought by a rider coming up from San Felipe. In the letters Summers declared that the land was better in Austin's colony, and that to his mind the town of San Felipe was in many ways superior to Nacogdoches—at least to the extent that it was more American.

In the letter to Lon, Summers enclosed the deed which had been wrested from Crenshaw. He requested Lon to take it to the alcalde and have it entered of record. No explanation was given as to how it had been secured; only the statement that it was at least worth what he had paid for it and that some day he might have a chance to sell it and turn over the proceeds to Mary.

In the letter to Buell, he wrote:

"This is a better town for you, as a doctor, than Nacogdoches. I am afraid the chance of finding Gant is a slim one. Bowie told me that he is in Mexico. I have made other inquiries and have learned a few things which I can tell you upon your arrival. A big, red-headed fellow named Travis tells me that Gant will never again set his foot east of the Colorado unless he comes with the Mexican army. Bowie says the same. But in any case, you can do well here, I am sure."

Added to the letter was the significant postscript:

"I hope you have written to Carolin. You must remember, Jeff, that she will be very lonely, and mails are slow. I have taken the liberty of writing her, and of stating that you will soon join me here."

Jeff smiled at this last. It was typical of the way Summers went about working his will. What he desired, he imagined as half accomplished.

Jeff's smile faded quickly. It irked him that Summers would even hint that they might have to abandon the search for Gant. Anger flared up. He nursed it, and had worked himself into a fine rage when he suddenly remembered that he had promised to ride out east of town to call upon the sick wife of a farmer.

By the time he had reached the wagon yard and had saddled his horse, all thought of Gant was gone from his mind. He was no longer a man of vengeance following the trail of another; he was a healer going out to visit the sick.

6

As Bullard's strength increased he began to take short rides out over the roads and trails radiating from the town. Buell always accompanied him. On two or three occasions, at Bullard's request, Red Ruth rode with them. To them she was something more than the woman who kept the wheel at Teal's Tavern. She had a mind, she had feeling, and she was companionable.

To Ruth these men were utterly different from those who crowded around the games in the gambling halls of the town. They offered no apologies for riding with her; they cared not a straw who saw them in her company. Here were men who knew what it is to be grateful.

One day when the three were riding together they followed a path, scarce more than a game trail, until it faded altogether in the deep woods. Bullard drew rein and dismounting sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree. Ruth stood by her horse, stroking his neck. Buell, boy-like, sprawled belly down in the grass.

This day they had ridden in silence. Bullard seemed in no mood for conversation. Two or three times he had started to speak, but each time had broken off abruptly. Ruth and Jeff, sensing the mood of their companion, had held their tongues.

Bullard wanted to talk but he did not want Ruth to hear. Yet he knew that she must hear. Sitting on the fallen tree, he at last found tongue.

"I'll be strong enough to go on now in a day or two," he said.

Ruth gave a little gasp of surprise. Then, to cover up, she began running her fingers through the mane of the big bay.

Jeff rolled over and sat up. "You're weak yet, Lon," he protested. "There's no hurry."

"Summers is getting anxious," Bullard answered. "I think we had better go on."

"Why are you going on?" Ruth asked, keeping her eyes on the work of her fingers.

Bullard looked at her for a long minute. What a striking picture she made, standing there by the side of the big bay, her hair reflecting the light that streamed down through the leaves and her cheeks as full of color as those of a child. When he began to notice such things, Lon told himself, it was time to be moving on.

"I have just told you why," he answered at last. "Summers is anxious for us to come on."

"Why should you follow him?" she pressed.

Lon shrugged his shoulders. For the life of him he could think of but one reason why he should make haste to follow Summers, and that reason stood before him, pressing a question.

"Jeff is anxious to go on," he said, seeking escape on the shoulders of another. "He wants to set himself up in San Felipe."

"He has set himself up here," Ruth answered before

Jeff could speak. "Perhaps better than he will do in San Felipe. Isn't that true?" she demanded, turning to Buell.

"Well—," Buell began slowly, "I have at least done better here than I ever did back home. But maybe things get better the further you go."

"That's the man, for you!" Ruth retorted. "Always chasing a rainbow. You always think there is something better further on."

"Um-m! That idea has gone a long way toward settling this country," Buell answered.

Ruth tossed her head in defiance. "Yes, and most of the men are the very ones who didn't, or couldn't, make a go of it back home."

"Oh, come now!" Jeff said, knowing that in his case, at any rate, she had struck the mark.

"It's the truth," she went on. "I could give you a dozen examples—men who just dropped the reins back east and came out here because 'cows' horns are long at a distance.' They thought they would find something better. Actually, they were only trying to run away from themselves. I'd think a man would have too much spunk to run away from something he was afraid of."

She had been talking to Jeff, but her eyes now strayed to Lon. He avoided them and began digging into the moist earth with the toe of his shoe. The silence was long and strained. At last Lon looked up and smiled.

"I think you are exactly right about Jeff moving on," he said. "There's plenty here for him to do. And I'll admit the town suits me pretty well. I—I like it here. I guess I'll look around and see if I can't start a little store."

Nacogdoches was working its spell. Those who stayed too long found difficulty in leaving. But Bullard knew, deep in his heart, that it was not the town alone that was holding him. Ruth had flung him a challenge. He wouldn't run away from the one thing in the world of which he was afraid.

For days Jeff Buell had been seeing things that escaped Lon's eyes, and as they rode back into town he noticed that Ruth had a new look in her eyes—a look that was half hope, half triumph.



Chapter Three

A GIANT COMES RIDING

I

ALTHOUGH Summers had set his mind and his heart upon the development of the farm, he could not close his ears to the war mutterings of the colonists. Many of the rights assured them under the Constitution of 1824 had been violated by the Mexican Government and there was a widespread fear that Mexican troops would soon be quartered throughout the various departments to enforce the dictatorial will of Santa Anna, who had long planned to send armed forces into Texas to prevent any uprising which might injure his plans to establish himself as the "Napoleon of the West." He had reason to suspect that the colonists were planning independence, for there were many who did not bridle their tongues and who openly championed a struggle for freedom. Texas was asking for statehood at the very moment when Santa Anna was planning a program to reduce all of the states of the federation to mere provinces, leaving the central government in position to make laws, collect revenues, and impose taxation without any representation on the part of the peoples of the provinces.

Such a program might find no armed opposition on the part of those provinces which were purely Mexican, inured as they were to vassalage, but it would find hearty resistance in Texas. Here were men descended from those

farmers who had stood against the legions of the king at Lexington, at Bunker Hill, and at Kings Mountain. They were the sons of men who loved freedom. Their sires, having once bought it with blood, gave the heritage of freedom to sons who loved it the more passionately. Santa Anna might make his plans, but he had yet to reckon with the Anglo-Americans of Texas.

His real plan was obscured under the growing discontent of the colonists over the questions of land speculations and the collection of customs. Although they did not know his plan, their grievances were none the less great and their fears became increasingly greater when the rumor spread that Austin was to be transferred from Mexico City to a prison in California. Added to this was the threat that armed garrisons would soon be placed throughout the departments.

Santa Anna had failed to read the causes leading up to the war of the Revolution; he had failed to take into consideration the blood streams of the men he was planning to rule.

By the early part of the summer the various departments were warmly divided into two factions—the war party and the submissionists. Leading the war party were such men as Travis, Williamson, and Bowie; the latter now being in Monclova attending the meeting of the legislature.

It was natural that Summers should be strongly influenced by such a man as Williamson. On many occasions, when riding into San Felipe, he spent hours with Williamson and soon became firmly convinced that war would strike before the summer passed.

One day in the field, when he and Abel were chopping weeds out of the cotton and Abel was fretting over the fact that they had not been able to get in a larger acreage, Summers leaned on his hoe handle and said:

"It doesn't make any difference, Abel. I'm afraid it will never be picked. The less we have in, the less we lose."

"What do you mean? Ain't we goin' to git title?"

"Oh, that part will work out all right! But we'll be carrying a rifle by fall instead of a cotton bag."

"Now, Will, you keep yore nose out of that business. Here I've bin workin' my finger nails off to plant a crop that I hate in the first place, but now that it's planted, by doggies! I aim to pick it. I belong to the peace party. If Three-Legged Willie don't close his pan on all this talk he'll hafta be runnin' faster than his peg leg can carry him. That's all his talk'll amount to. That Mexican General—what's his name? Cos?—will send some soldiers up here to capture the leaders and that'll be the end of the thing."

"Do you want to be ruled by them?" Summers asked.

"No, but the road's cut out between here and Tennessee. I made it once and I reckon I can make it agin. You're a fine one to be talkin' war! What about Mary? What's to become of her? What we bin workin' our daylight's out fer?"

"Mary will be married before fall," Summers answered.

Abel's mouth opened in astonishment.

"What? I thought Petty had kinda got cold feet after we showed up. He hasn't bin over here but twice."

"I know, but it was Mary who gave him the cold feet. I couldn't quite figure it out at first, but I soon discovered that she had shooed him away because she thought she was obligated to stay here and keep house for us. I had a long talk with her and found out exactly where the wind lay."

"Well——," Abel said with a slow drawl, "we did come a mighty long ways to do our batchin'."

"That's exactly what she was thinking," Summers answered. "We came here to help her, Abel, but we can't take the place of a husband. She needs a husband to help rear her children. Petty needs a mother for his. At first I didn't like the idea, but I know now that it is a good match. Things couldn't go on this way forever. Since we came to help her, our first thought must be for her."

"You say you talked this over with her?"

"Yes. I've got things fixed up. You'll see more of Petty from now on."

Abel leaned heavily upon his hoe handle and looked down the long rows of weedy cotton.

"Who're we choppin' weeds fer now?" he asked. "Mary or Petty?"

"Neither. Petty has a good place and more land than he can use. The place up at Nacogdoches will be deeded to Mary—or sold if we get a chance. Mary understands that and so does Petty. That part is all fixed. This place will come to us. And when the trouble is over, maybe I'll hang up my shingle in San Felipe and you can run the farm."

Abel glared at him. "You're a hell of a fixer! You

marry off the best cook in Texas, you pass up a wad of money right under yore nose, you saddle me with a farm I don't want, and then you talk about leavin' me on it when the trouble's over. The trouble has already begun! Fer my part I'm goin' to stick by this measly little old piece of cotton till I can git it picked and sold. Then you can have the farm. I'm headed fer Tennessee."

Viciously he began swinging his hoe as he started down a new row.

2

In June and July the hands of the Master Weaver were feverishly engaged in drawing the tangled threads of men's lives toward one common center for the completion of the pattern. In the early part of June there occurred at Anahauc an incident of far-reaching effect and of great help to the war party. Some Mexican soldiers under Tenorio, who was enforcing the collection of customs at that port, became the object of a joke perpetrated by an unknown seaman and two citizens of Anahauc. They went to the beach with a box of rubbish and, on being challenged by the guard, declared that the box was filled with rubbish to be used as ballast. This satisfied the guard and they were passed. But after the box was loaded on the boat, and the two citizens were returning, a number of Tenorio's soldiers approached them and informed them that they were under arrest. The citizens submitted quietly and were walking along under guard when a young man named Smith, being far too curious and perhaps too mirthful over the joke, approached the

guard for a closer look at what was going on. One of the Mexican soldiers, seeing no humor in the situation and being over-zealous in his mission, shot Smith down without warning or without making any demand that he halt.

The news of this incident was promptly dispatched to San Felipe. It so happened that the arrival of this news was almost co-incident with the return of several Texans who had been at the meeting of the legislature at Monclova. These men brought the definite knowledge that Santa Anna and the party of the army and of the church were busy fashioning shackles with which to bind and enslave all Texas.

San Felipe began buzzing with excitement and indignation. The war party was gaining strength. In the midst of all this unrest a courier from General Cos arrived in San Felipe, bearing dispatches to the political chief of the town. Several of the citizens, now thoroughly aroused and with grounds for suspicion, waylaid the courier and seized his dispatches. Those dispatches proved beyond a shadow of doubt that the government was planning to bring the colonists under subjection. One of the letters was from General Cos, addressed to Tenorio at Anahauc, assuring the latter that he would soon be strongly reinforced by additional men under arms.

This was the match to the powder. If Cos was preparing to close the ports and occupy the strong coastal points, then it was time to strike. Accordingly, a meeting of the citizens of San Felipe was called for the following day.

Summers, hearing of the meeting, rode into town in company with Abel. The excitement of the citizens did not take the form of much loose talk and no action. It was a cold, deadly tension that augured ill for someone.

Williamson, presiding at the meeting, found himself strongly backed by an ever-increasing number of men willing to pledge their arms and their lives in defense of the rights granted them under the constitution. The resolutions of that meeting were fiery enough to suit the most impetuous. They expressed opposition to Santa Anna and his plan to rob the colonists of their rights. They declared against the centralists and put the meeting on record as standing squarely behind Don Augustin Viesca, the imprisoned constitutional governor of the state.

Then, strangely, after this meeting adjourned, someone chanced to recall that while they had made clear their stand with reference to the government, they had quite overlooked the fact that General Cos was sending more soldiers to Anahauc. Why not call another meeting for the purpose of raising a volunteer army to proceed against that port and capture Tenorio before he became too strongly entrenched? The suggestion was acted upon promptly. At this second meeting resolutions were passed providing for the organization of a volunteer company for marching against Anahauc.

This action was the thin, clear note of a trumpet call.

Abel Roundtree did not clearly understand the purport of the first meeting, but he could understand direct action. This second meeting meant action.

"Now, Will," he said, drawing Summers to one side,

"you keep out of this. Somebody's goin' to git his whisks singed."

Summers offered no reply. A few minutes later Williamson came stumping toward them and stopped to talk with Summers.

"This means business," he said, his eyes gleaming. "They've woke up to the fact that it's time to strike a blow. If I'm not mistaken there'll be plenty of volunteers for this undertaking."

"I, for one, would go," Summers answered, "if it were not for the fact that I can't leave Mary just now."

"You keep your shirt on," Williamson advised. "There will be plenty of need for your rifle later on. Ben Petty was in to see me yesterday and hinted he was going to have need of me to tie a knot before fall. When is it coming off?"

"I don't know, exactly. In September, I think."

"That'll leave you sort of flat, won't it?" Williamson said. "But we'll make a time of it. Ben Petty has a lot of friends and there will be people at the wedding you never saw before. I'll bring along my banjo, if you like. I'm just as good at playing for a dance as I am at tying a knot or trying a case. And I like it better. Who's going to do the cooking after Mary leaves?"

Abel decided this was the proper time to make his position known.

"If you keep on talkin' war like it's bin talked at these two meetin's to-day," he said, "we won't need any cook. We'll be sizzlin' in our own fat."

Having so expressed himself, he turned and walked away.

Williamson looked at Summers in surprise. "I thought he was with you," he said.

Summers laughed. "He is. You don't know Abel. When the time comes you'll find him riding right along—a little bit behind."

3

The weaver of destinies drew another bright, strong cord into the fabric when the youthful, patriotic, impetuous Travis, with a little company of twenty-five stalwarts of his own fibre, stormed Anahauc from the water front and forced Tenorio to surrender. Acting upon the slender authority of the second meeting at San Felipe, Travis had at once set about raising a volunteer company. Undaunted by the fact that only twenty-five men responded to the call, he held to his purpose. Twenty-five proved quite enough. The net bag was the surrender of the garrison, the capture of sixty-five muskets and bayonets, and the temporary frustration of General Cos's plans.

Travis had started war. Actually, he had fired but one shot from a small cannon, but it was heard as far west as Mexico, and it was heard east of the Sabine where Houston, with listening ear, had acumen enough to know that the rifles and horse of Texas would soon be on the march, no matter how the submissionists might view this hasty action.

Out of his seclusion he came, a Brobdingnagian belted about the middle by a gaudy sash and with a colorful blanket thrown carelessly over powerful shoulders. The great beaver hat topping the leonine head was pulled for-

ward at a determined angle to shade deep eyes that were seeing what few men saw—the bright star rising. Westward he rode, silent, brooding, thoughtful and unheralded—the new, strong, brilliant cord in the pattern of the great fabric.

At San Augustine he halted to make prophecy, but the people there were dim of eye and fearful of prophets. They mistook a giant for a dexterous juggler.

Tighter he pulled his gaudy sash, gave his blanket a scornful toss and grimly rode westward to Nacogdoches. He had met with fools before. Somewhere he would find wise men who could see a new star.

Travis had fired but one shot, and a giant came riding.

4

By August the rumble of the approaching storm could be heard across the continent. Crockett's ears had long been attuned to it and he was tempestuous enough to want to be in the vortex. For the time being, however, his attention was held by his race for re-election. He was still bitterly opposed to Jackson and was still on the search for the deposits. But again, as once before, a fickle constituency shifted its support from one skilled with the rifle to one who was skilled with the pen. Crockett's opponent was short on woods lore and long on writing chronicles. The writer won. Perhaps Crockett's shooting eye was dimming, or his imagination may have failed him in the matter of stories.

When the result was known, he drew away from the subsiding noise and clamor of the campaign to look west-

ward. He, too, saw the star. With characteristic earnestness he went before those who had deserted him and warned them once again against the evils of a dictatorial government. In closing his speech he said, with bitter vigor:

"You can all go to Hell. I am going to Texas."

Another rifle in buckskin was soon to come marching.

5

Back in Washington, President Jackson listened anxiously for the first clash of arms. He could smell powder afar off. It itched him and made him restless, but for once his hands were fettered by treaties.

Nor was Jackson the only one in Washington who could see the signs. The Buell home was no longer the gathering place for fun-seeking youth. Carolin Buell had no heart for dancing and no tongue for jest. Her eyes were toward the vast frontier that had swallowed her heart. It had taken the only two men in the world she had ever loved. One, the brother, had gone because his own heart was broken; the other man had gone because he could not love a woman who lacked courage—especially one lacking the courage to rebuke a dandy who made fun of his background.

A thousand times in the past six months Carolin had remembered that night when she had glanced up and caught sight of Summers watching her in the mirror. He had heard. His eyes told her that. She had held her tongue only because she thought Gant's unguarded remark would be the very thing that would spur Summers

to action and loose his tongue. But he had taken her silence as assent because, in an effort to hold those things that were dear to her heart, she had pictured herself in the wrong light. Now he would never know. He would never come back. There, in that new country, he would marry some woman with courage.

It was a devastating thought. Was courage the needed thing? If so, then as women had done from the dawn of time, she would follow the trail of the man she loved.

Only one word had come from Summers—a brief letter in which he assured her that all was well and that Jeff would soon join him in San Felipe. She had read it again and again, searching for some word of reassurance that he still felt in his heart what she had so often seen in his eyes. The word was not there, but at last the thought came: Why had he written at all?

Her answer to that question furnished soil for the seed of hope. She would go to Jeff. His presence would furnish her with fitting excuse, and it might serve to open the eyes of a blind man.

When she made her decision known to Major Langstone, he fretted and fumed and tried to shout her down.

"What will you do with the place?" he challenged, expecting to find her unprepared for the question.

"Sell it," she answered calmly. "Mr Jim Herndon has offered to buy it."

"But you—but there—" the Major hesitated. Even now he hated to tell her the whole truth.

"There isn't much equity left," she finished his sentence for him. "I know all about that."

"And the niggers—what will you do with them?" He

thought he had her there. She had always refused to listen to any of his proposals that she rid herself of several of the slaves who were not doing enough to earn their salt.

"Sell them," she answered resolutely. "You've told me a dozen times that I should. I'll keep old Chloe. She will go with me."

"You are crazy, Carolin! Jeff will be back here before long—glad enough to get back."

"Yes, if I stay here, he will. And what is there to come to? We have spent nearly everything. He wanted a new chance. I—I am going to help him."

The Major turned away and stood looking out of the window. He recalled that day when Summers had come into this same room with the letter from Mary. At a long last he turned from the window and walked over to Carolin. He put his arm around her, drawing her to him with fatherly affection.

"Is Jeff the only reason why you want to go out there?" he asked.

She avoided his eyes for a moment. Then, so utterly tired, so greatly in need of someone who could understand, she buried her head on his shoulder and broke into tears.

Major Langstone, who knew a great deal about love, needed no further answer.

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Early in September a boat cleared Chesapeake Bay, bound for the mouth of the Brazos. Among the passen-

gers were a number of adventurers who had heard the faint clattering of mustering arms. It furnished them with a chance to escape the tedium of nothing to do.

Among others who stood on the upper deck, looking to sea, was Carolin Buell. Near at hand stood old Chloe, her arms akimbo as she glared at the gentlemen who seemed always to enjoy best the view from a position near Carolin.

Carolin's eyes, however, were toward the open sea. Not once had she looked back. There was nothing behind. In the hold were two stout trunks, carrying those little bits of finery and mementos which she could not give up. Everything now lay ahead. The question of whether men alone can subdue a wilderness never once entered her mind. She was occupied solely with the thought that woman alone, by her own skill, can never ease an aching, empty heart.

Into the pattern the weaver was drawing the white, pure thread of devotion.

6

Austin, at last released from prison, reached San Felipe in September. Here was the greatest stalwart of them all. Here was the man who had dreamed dreams and made them all come true. His was the energy, his the devotion, his the privation and his the faith that had given land to the landless and a vision to those who could not see beyond the day or the hour. When others grew faint, he put his shoulder the more firmly to the wheel; when others lacked faith, he spoke words of courage;

when other heads grew hot, his kept cool; when hotspurs fretted for war, he sought peace.

After eighteen months as a prisoner, wronged without reason and deprived of his rights, he came back to his own people, still anxious to preserve peace. However, his love of justice was greater than his love of peace, and within a fortnight after his arrival in San Felipe he faced a choice between absolute enslavement and liberty. Austin was capable of making but one choice. He issued a call to arms!

The oak of Texas, deep rooted in the hearts of his people, set himself for the storm.

"There can now be no halfway measures," he declared at a public meeting. "War in full! The sword is drawn and the scabbard put aside until all the Mexican military are driven from Texas."

That night horsemen went galloping out of San Felipe, carrying the word of war throughout the departments and calling the men to arms. To Nacogdoches rode Johnson and Baker to urge that department to join the standard. "Tell them," was Austin's word, "that war and peace parties are at an end. There is no remedy but through arms. Our freedom and our lives demand that all the brave rifles of that department march without delay."

Many were the men of Nacogdoches waiting for this call. And eastward, at San Augustine, the tallest man in all the crowd stood waiting those galloping messengers. He was Houston—the giant with the gaudy sash pulled tight about his middle and his eyes looking steadily westward.

7

On the Saturday night following Austin's call to arms, Ben Petty and Mary Summers were joined in marriage. Williamson was there to tie the knot. True to his predictions, Summers found himself host to men and women he had never seen. For fifty miles they came on horseback, the men dressed in their best bib and tucker and the women carrying in saddle bags dresses that had come from New Orleans and Philadelphia.

After the ceremony and the supper, the dancing began. West of the Mississippi there was no greater artist on the banjo than Three-Legged Willie. He put his heart and soul into it, loudly rapping time with the end of his peg leg.

No stately, formal dancing would serve these people. They cut the pigeon wing and the double shuffle. Many of the men whose feet were clad in moccasins borrowed shoes from their friends when their time came to dance and proceeded to knock the splinters from the puncheon floor. A jug of good whiskey brought from the store in San Felipe gave energy to the poor dancer even though it did not increase his skill.

Dawn was streaking the east when the most vigorous admitted that they were at last "tuckered out." Then, amidst much shouting and beating of pans, Ben Petty lifted Mary to the seat on his wagon, tucked her sleeping children into the blankets in the wagon box where his own two boys lay sleeping, and proudly climbed to the seat beside Mary. His feelings had to have some outlet, and like a boy off to the fair he cracked the long bull whip over the backs of the sleeping oxen. They had been

quite indifferent to all the noise and clamor, but the crack of the whip aroused them.

Slowly they got under way. There was no need to take alarm at one crack of the whip. Before they had turned into the road they knew that the bull whip had been put aside and that their driver was either asleep or no longer interested in speed.

"Well," said Abel after he had watched the wagon turn into the road, "I'm in fer a long hungry spell now and I'd jest as well start drunk. Will, what's become of that jug?"



Chapter Four

AND A BOLD FLAG FLYING

I

ON THE following Monday morning, Summers and Abel came riding into town, rifles slung across the pommels of their saddles and with saddle bags bulging like the jowls of a provident chipmunk. Summers' horse, Hard Cash, was full of life and anxious for a gallop; Abel's horse, Pete, seemed resentful of the bright sun and the weight of his spiritless rider. Each horse reflected the mood of his rider.

Summers drew rein near one of the stores. Dismounting, and leading his horse, he walked over to accost a man who came walking swiftly down the street. Abel halted and sat at slouching ease in his saddle.

"Mr Austin?" Summers called.

The man wheeled. "Yes," he answered.

"My name is Summers. I have come to offer you my services."

Austin showed momentary surprise, then extended his hand.

"Williamson has told me of you," he said. "You haven't lost any time, Mr Summers."

"Is there time to be lost?" Summers answered.

"None. I wish there were more of the same mind. But what about your crop, sir?"

"It can wait. There will be men enough to employ

that excuse. I am at your service—I and my friend.”

Austin glanced at Abel, who sat slouching in his saddle. Then his eyes turned appraisingly to Hard Cash.

“You are well mounted,” he said, approvingly. “If you are really ready to offer your services you can be of great help.”

“I am ready, sir.”

“Good! Word has come to me that General Cos has landed at Copano with four hundred troops. He is now moving to Goliad, with San Antonio de Bexar as his destination. I shall try to intercept him on the Lavaca. Would you undertake to ride to Gonzales, warn the settlers there and ask them to join with me at James Kerr’s, on the Lavaca?”

“Yes, I will go.”

“You know the road?”

“I have never been over it, but I will have no trouble. I am not one to get lost, Mr Austin.”

“Good! There is a cut-off near Rocky Creek, but you had best keep to the main trail. When can you start?”

“Now.”

“Then come over to my office and I will give you a letter to Ponton, the alcalde at Gonzales. I hope you will make all haste, Mr Summers.”

“Few horses can make the distance quicker than my own,” Summers answered, his tone being that of one who makes a statement rather than a boast.

“What about your friend?” Austin asked. “Will he go with you?”

“Yes, of course. His horse is powerful enough, once he gets into action.”

Austin turned back down the street. Summers followed, leading his mount.

Abel slowly gathered up his reins, kicked Pete in the ribs, and followed after.

2

Abel and Summers talked little along that swift, hard ride to Gonzales. Abel was too provoked for conversation. Summers, as usual, found his thoughts sufficient—and at times almost overwhelming. Even duty, and things he had mistaken for duty, could not bring happiness. He could not keep his thoughts from wandering back to Washington. Duty could not crowd Carolin out of his mind.

When he and Abel reached Gonzales, a small settlement of squat, drab houses on the east bank of the Guadalupe, they found there only eighteen men capable of bearing arms. Summers delivered his letter to the alcalde. Ponton read it hurriedly and then said:

“It looks like the trouble would start right here, sir. Several years ago this settlement was given a small, unmounted brass cannon for protection against the Indians. Yesterday the commander at Bexar sent five cavalrymen here with an oxcart to get this cannon. I put them off by telling them I couldn’t deliver it until I had an order from the chief of this department. Their leader has gone back to Bexar, but he left four men on the other side of the river. He’ll be back with reinforcements soon, or I miss my guess.”

“You ain’t goin’ to give it up, are you?” Abel asked.

"No. But I need time. I have sent a rider to Bastrop, and one to Moore's place over on the Colorado, asking for help. They ought to get here before the Mexicans can get back from Bexar."

"How many men have you here now?" Summers asked.

"Eighteen."

"Countin' us?" Abel asked.

"No. Twenty, if you are here to stay."

"How many Mexicans did you say was over on the other side of the river?" Abel continued his questioning.

"Four," Ponton answered.

"Let's git 'em!" Abel at once became enthusiastic.

Ponton shook his head. "That wouldn't do us any good. We'll save our powder for bigger game."

"It wouldn't take much powder," Abel argued. "I was always a hand to take what's in sight."

"There'll be more in sight soon enough," Ponton said.

"I ain't hoggy," Abel replied.

Summers managed to keep his face straight, but his eyes were twinkling. As of old, Abel always forgot his ills and his complaints when in sight of a fight or a frolic.

3

That day the men of the town set about making ready for armed resistance. First they buried the cannon. Next they moved the ferry from the river front and concealed it in a bayou a short distance above the town.

Abel, meanwhile, was busy getting acquainted. His mind was still on the Mexican cavalrymen across the river.

"It ain't sense not to go after them," he constantly argued. "They can see what we are doin', if they ain't blind. It's like tryin' to keep a secret at a quiltin' bee."

Three other choice spirits agreed with him. Since there was yet no organization, and each man was the authority for his own actions, they went to the river and crossed over in a small boat. Once across they boldly advanced upon the camp of the cavalrymen. One of these, suspecting trouble, mounted his horse and spurred away in the direction of San Antonio de Bexar. Abel fired at him, but the distance was too great. His shot, however, had a very salutary effect upon the three other cavalrymen. They promptly surrendered. In high fettle Abel and his companions returned to the town with their prisoners.

In reporting the incident to Summers, Abel explained the escape of the one cavalryman, and added:

"I'm goin' to back out of this business, Will, if my shootin' don't git better. There's times when my back sight blurs somethin' awful."

4

True to Ponton's predictions, a force of about one hundred Mexican horse appeared on the opposite side of the river the morning of October 1. Their commander, Captain Francisco Castaneda, at once renewed the demand for the cannon and the return of the ferry to its proper place. This demand was carried across the river by a swimmer. But by this time the small force at Gonzales had been augmented by the arrival of nearly a hundred

colonists from all along the Colorado, and they were in no temper to meet with the demand. The swimmer got only a bath for his pains.

Castaneda at once began a blustering and fuming. Mother of God! but he would put fear into the hearts of these rebels! He would show them how formidable he was. Whereupon he rode his troopers up and down the river bank opposite the town. Bravely and erect he sat in his saddle, leading the parade. Now if the fools had any sense they would promptly surrender that cannon.

Several of the Americans, drawn to the river bank, thought the spectacle imposing enough to merit shouted jeers and cat calls. Meanwhile, back in the town, preparations were being made to cross the river and attack the Mexicans the following morning.

A group of men had retired to Sowell's blacksmith shop and were busily fashioning improvised cannon balls and pieces of scrap for use in the cannon which they had dug up and mounted on a pair of heavy wagon wheels.

Abel was a prime mover in this group. For hours he stood at the forge, tirelessly working the small hand bellows. He was not the least concerned with the meeting that had been called for the election of officers and the planning of the attack. He wanted to see more cannon balls.

When Moore, the newly elected colonel, returned to the blacksmith shop in company with Summers and a small group of riflemen, Abel wiped streaming sweat from his face and said:

"Colonel Moore, these Mexicans have come a long ways after this cannon. They kinda seem to have their

hearts set on gittin' it. It strikes me it 'ud be a good idea to make a sort of banner and say on it, 'Come and take it.' That 'ud let 'em know how we stand on the question."

The suggestion was hailed with delight. Not only would it serve to express their feelings, but it would be their flag.

A strip of cotton cloth was forthwith produced. On this was drawn the crude picture of a cannon, mounted on wheels that were out of all proportion to the size of the piece. Under this drawing, in large letters, was the single line of bold defiance—COME AND TAKE IT.

Now, with a cannon, a hundred rifles, and a bold flag flying, they were ready for a fight.

A heavy fog arose from the river that night, blanketing the lowlands. Colonel Moore, taking advantage of this added protective screen, moved his troops across the river and waited for daylight. Four o'clock came and the fog was thicker than ever. Moore at once threw out several scouts and began a cautious advance upon the Mexican position.

Abel, no longer lagging, volunteered as a scout and was promptly chosen. He moved forward and the fog swallowed him. Now and then he halted to listen. Off to the left a night bird uttered a querulous cry and was answered by the timid call of a warbler not yet sure of the dawn. Then, from the higher ground directly ahead, a horse whinnied. A guarded voice came through the fog, speaking a tongue which Abel could not understand. Again he moved forward. Suddenly, from almost under his feet, a Mexican sentry rose up out of the tall grass

and uttered a sharp command. Abel leaped upon him before he could lift his rifle. Down they went in the tall grass. Abel's fingers found the sentry's throat, choking back the cry of alarm. When at last the man was silent, Abel dragged him back to the advancing line. But another scout, over on the left, was less fortunate and an alert sentry sounded the alarm.

Colonel Moore quickly formed his men in battle line and waited for the fog to clear. The brass cannon occupied the center of the line. Near it stood a standard bearer, holding the flag which, wanting a breeze, hung limp along the staff.

At last the fog began to clear. The Mexican force, occupying the crest of a lift in the land, now stood out in bold relief.

In a thin line the Americans began the advance. When within three hundred yards of the Mexicans the little brass cannon thundered its first reply to Castaneda's demand for its surrender. A morning breeze came out the east and extended the challenge of the Texans' banner.

Castaneda had come for the cannon but not for its vomit. He at once lifted a white flag and sent a messenger proposing a parley.

Many of the Texans, thinking this an act of surrender, set up a wild cheering. Abel, in disgust, threw his hat on the ground and kicked it viciously.

"This is the dam'dest war!" he complained to Summers. "I thought them fellers was out lookin' fer a fight."

"Wait," Summers told him as Colonel Moore, in company with one other man, went forward to meet with

Castaneda in the open field between the opposing armies. "This is only a parley, I think."

"Parley?" Abel snorted. "Why parley? When you git a man to the place where he wants to talk things over, that's the time to give him another kick in the britches."

Out in the center of the field the commanders met. Castaneda opened the parley.

"Why do you attack me?" he asked.

"I think you know well enough," Moore replied. "You have demanded the surrender of our cannon, and have threatened, in case of refusal, to take it by force. We have accepted your threat. You are acting under the orders of that tyrant, Santa Anna, whose purpose it is to disarm us so that we cannot fight for the rights which he has chosen to trample under foot. But we will not submit to such a plan, sir. If you want the piece, you must come and take it."

Castaneda was a diplomat as well as a soldier. "I am a republican myself, sir," he responded, "though still an officer of the federal government. But, sir, the majority of the states have decided upon some changes in our government and the people of Texas must submit to it. I have no desire to fight with you."

"If those are your sentiments," Colonel Moore replied, "and if you are indeed in sympathy with the constitution, I offer you the opportunity of surrendering, with the troops under your command, and you may join us in the defense of the constitution. I can assure you that you will be received with open arms."

Castaneda bit his lip. Diplomacy had failed.

"I am still an officer of the government," he replied, "and must obey my orders."

"To take the cannon?" Moore asked.

"Yes."

Moore turned and pointed to the flag fluttering above the cannon. "Captain Castaneda," he said, smiling grimly, "our banner invites you to obey your orders. There is no need for further parley."

Turning, he returned to his own lines and ordered an immediate attack. Again the cannon roared defiance as the riflemen started forward on the run, holding their fire until they should come within forty or fifty yards of the enemy. But the enemy was in no humor for a pitched battle. Mounting hurriedly, they made a hasty retreat in the direction of Bexar.

The riflemen, on foot, could not well overtake them and were forced to content themselves with firing a few shots in the direction of the fleeing horsemen. One Mexican fell. He was promptly claimed by every man who could show an empty piece.

Colonel Moore was elated with the victory, as were all save Abel. He was disgusted.

"It's a mighty puny war!" he complained again and again.

"Just keep yore shirt on," one of the Texans told him. "You'll get more before it's finished."

"Maybe," Abel growled. "But the next battle I go into I'll go on horseback so's I can git clost enough to the enemy to let him know I'm mad at him."



Chapter Five

ON TO BEXAR!

I

ALTHOUGH the clash at Gonzales was, as Abel put it, a mighty puny war, the news of it, carried from settlement to settlement by galloping couriers, served to arouse all those Texans who loved freedom and start them riding posthaste for Gonzales.

Back in Nacogdoches both Bullard and Buell, like the majority of the citizens of the town, had been rather indifferent to the fulminations of the war party. Buell's entire attention had been taken up by a growing practice. It was greatly in his favor that he came from the capital city of the States. The people reasoned that it must follow that he was better qualified than the other doctors who had been longer among them. His successes strengthened their belief. Jeff was delighted with all this, but each time that he wrote to Carolin he indicated that he did not intend to stay in Nacogdoches. He knew she would follow him the minute she thought he was definitely established. He hinted, in one letter, that he might go on down to San Felipe, but added that he was only making the trip "to look around." The time for such departure never came. There seemed to be no stop-gap to illness.

Bullard, having purchased a third interest in a mercantile store, had lost all interest in pushing on. The

town was working its spell. As Bullard had been at The Forks, so was he here—content with his place, fond of his fellow citizens and finding pleasure in their company. Then, too, deep in his heart he was pondering the wisdom of speaking of love to the woman who was known throughout the country as Red Ruth. That part did not sound well. It gave him pause. And yet, he had seen her bending over the sick. He had seen her heart and her soul. Her name did not fit at all. Time and again he was on the verge of offering her another name; of offering her a chance to take a woman's place in the home. He knew what she was on the inside. It was not public opinion that held him silent; it was the fear of what Ruth would say.

Just when he had about made his decision, news came of the affair at Gonzales. He knew, instinctively, that Summers would be drawn into the conflict. This was now no proper time for a man to be pondering love. Now, as a friend to freedom, it was his duty to first play the part of a citizen. There would be time enough, upon his return, to settle the question of love. Certainly it would not be fair to speak of it to Ruth and then go riding away to war. So thinking, he plunged into the task of helping Johnson and Baker recruit a company of men well armed and equipped for action.

As for Jeff, he knew that on the line of march, and in battle, there would be need of the skilled hand of the physician. Into one of the supply wagons went his surgical tools and a chest of drugs. Over the pommel of his saddle he slung a rifle. So equipped he was ready to deal death or battle for a life.

On the morning set for departure, when the volunteer company was forming in the plaza, Bullard turned back to his room in Teal's Tavern for one last look around. He could not escape the feeling that he was leaving something behind. When he came back from his room, and entered the lobby, he saw Ruth standing at the door, gazing out into the street. Indeed he *was* leaving something behind!

He glanced around. The room was wholly deserted. Everyone had been drawn into the street to bid farewell to the company of citizen-soldiers. Only Ruth remained behind, in the room where the wheel was now still. She was craning her neck in an effort to get one last look at a horseman who had not thought enough of her to say good-bye.

"Ruth," Lon spoke, quietly.

She wheeled. "Oh! I thought you had gone. I—I have been looking for you."

"I came back to say good-bye," Lon explained. "You were not here when I came in, so I went to my room to see if I had left anything behind." He halted. A thought came, demanding expression. He wanted to voice it, but he feared it would sound like a pretty speech. Courage came at last.

"I found I had left something," he said.

"Oh, I see!" So he had only come back for something he had left behind.

While the thought was still in her mind he came close and drew her to him.

"You are what I had left behind," he said, and wondered at the sound of his voice repeating words which

he had feared would sound like a pretty speech. He kissed her, awkwardly, as would a man who was greying at the temples and unused to the expressions of love.

Ruth's free hand went up to her throbbing throat. She tried to speak but there were too many words struggling for expression. She merely stood there, inarticulate. Lon saw his answer in her eyes.

"I'll be back soon," he said. "This trouble can't last very long," he added, to quiet her fears.

The clatter of horsemen sounded out in the street. Again he kissed her, quickly, impulsively, and turned to the door.

She found words at last, and later rebuked herself for not being able to think of braver ones.

"It will be a long time—now, Lon. You must hurry back. It will be so long—so very long."

After he was gone, and long after the cavalcade had clattered down the street, she stood there in the open doorway, looking westward. Her eyes were dim and she could not see beyond the curtain of her fears.

All over Texas women were standing in doorways waving brave farewells and then leaning back limp against the door jambs as they watched the little clouds of dust rising along the trails leading to Gonzales.

The battle at Gonzales completely upset Austin's plans for ambushing General Cos on the Lavaca. He knew that the news of this affair would reach Cos and arm him against surprise. Consequently, the idea was abandoned

and all efforts turned toward establishing Gonzales as a temporary mustering camp for the volunteers who were responding to the call to arms.

Cos, hearing of the fight at Gonzales and learning that the Texans were gathering there, at once made ready to proceed with all haste to San Antonio de Bexar and reinforce the small Mexican force holding that place. However, he left at Goliad a small force of about thirty men to guard a considerable quantity of military supplies; his thought being, doubtless, that he would subsequently return to this point.

But Cos had barely arrived in San Antonio when a small company of Texans, under Collingsworth, fell upon Goliad by night, capturing the entire garrison, including two hundred muskets, two pieces of artillery and a considerable quantity of ammunition.

It had been extremely thoughtful of Cos to be so helpful in aiding the Texans to arm themselves for the conflict.

When news of this reached Gonzales, the small army of volunteers at once lifted the cry, "On to Bexar." Austin had just arrived and had been elected commander-in-chief. He neither sought nor wanted the office. He was a colonist, not a soldier. But on being convinced that no other man could do so much to cement the various factions which had sprung up among the arriving volunteers, he accepted the post, dispatched couriers calling for more volunteers to join him on the line of march, and at once made ready to proceed against the enemy.

A temporary camp for the army had been established in a cornfield adjoining the town. Austin had selected

Summers as one of his orderlies, doubtless because he was better mounted than any of the others. He found, to his surprise, that in selecting one orderly he had gained two. Where Summers went Abel went. As yet no organization of companies had been perfected and each man did about as he pleased. It pleased Abel to be with Summers.

Abel and Summers kept their ears open for any news of the company coming from Nacogdoches. Word had come that such a company was on the way, and Summers knew, intuitively, that Lon and Jeff would be among them. This was definitely established by a lone rider who brought word that the Nacogdoches company was on the line of march, their progress somewhat impeded by the fact that they were bringing a small wagon train carrying supplies and extra ammunition. This rider, who knew both Buell and Bullard, assured Summers that they were with the company.

Summers' joy was unbounded, but it was short lived. Austin, realizing that the capture of Goliad had effectively cut off Cos's line of retreat and bottled him up in Bexar, at once issued orders to prepare to cross the Guadalupe the following day. His entire force did not exceed three hundred men, but their confidence was great. They were clamouring for action.

Austin's decision to move at once was a blow to Summers and Abel. They had hoped to remain here until the arrival of Jeff and Lon. That night Abel was morose and surly. He had a great deal to say about the wisdom of the commanding general. A man was a fool, he declared, who would march away from reinforcements,

especially when that company contained a rifleman like Bullard and a doctor like Buell. A doctor, Abel pointed out, was the very thing they needed to round out the army. Men were sure to get sick and hurt. He, for one, had been ailing for the past several days. What was more, he did not intend to move a step until the arrival of the company from Nacogdoches. He would be eternally damned if he would move until he was good and ready. It wasn't his fight anyhow, and he knew the road back to Tennessee.

A few of the other men, overhearing his remarks, thought his words smacked of cowardice. Summers blandly continued his preparations for the start on the morrow. He had heard Abel talk before.

The next morning the army crossed the river, making use of the ferry and the small boats. When the last man had crossed over, the newly elected officers began forming their companies for the line of march. It was not an easy task. Many of the men were unused to discipline and command. They had come to fight, not to be ordered around. It took nearly an hour to get them shaped into passable marching order. Even then the net result little resembled an army.

No two men were dressed alike. Most of them wore buckskin breeches, but even in the making of these each man had expressed his own ideas. Some were decorated with fringe and were full fitting; others were innocent of any decoration and were almost skin tight. Some were new and clean; others were hard, black and shiny. Still others, having been long subjected to rain and sun, were, as Abel had once complained of his own, so tight

that the wearer found some difficulty in sitting down. The old buckskin breeches, shaped to the wearer through the weathering of sun and rain, bagged outward at the knees at such an angle as to give the impression that the wearer was preparing to jump.

There was no agreement in the matter of headdress. Some wore broad-brimmed sombreros; a few were more fashionably attired in big Pittsburgers and tall beegums, and there was a liberal sprinkling of coonskin caps, with the tails hanging behind in orthodox fashion.

There were a few men mounted on horses of good American stock. By their side pranced small-boned Spanish ponies and half-broken mustangs. Here and there were men riding sober looking mules that were only waiting for a chance to show their independence.

Each man provided his own bedding and a small supply of provisions. For a canteen he carried a Spanish gourd, a peculiar member of the gourd family having two bowls connected by a short neck nicely suited for the adjustment of a strap or cord.

By dint of hard labor and many shouted commands, this tatterdemalion army was at last worked into some semblance of marching order. At the head flew the flag bearing the picture of the cannon and the defiant legend, "Come and Take It," while near the center of the column was the cannon itself, hitched to a yoke of long-horns. It was the only piece of artillery.

At last satisfied with the order, Austin gave the command to march. As the horsemen moved forward he rode out to one side to watch them pass in review. Summers, still acting as orderly, followed him. Abel,

who was still acting much as he pleased, ranged alongside.

Bravely the old cannon flag fluttered by, followed by a company of horse. Then came the cannon, screeching on the wooden axles of its carriage as the driver prodded the oxen with his goad. Then came more horses, their riders armed with long lances in addition to their rifles. The end of the column was obscured in the dust cloud rising from the fine soil of the bottom land.

Austin kept his thoughts to himself as he watched them ride by, but Abel found tongue.

"That's a hell of an army!" he said to Summers. "I hope they throw out some scouts to keep us from runnin' into anything."

Austin overheard the remark and turned in his saddle.

"What company do you belong to?" he asked.

"I'm in company with Summers here," Abel answered, nothing abashed.

"I have put Ben Milam in command of a spy company," Austin replied, sharply, "and since you are so anxious to see we are not surprised, you will report to Milam for duty."

"Now, General——" Abel began.

"You will report to Milam at once!" Austin interrupted. He had been trying to establish some form of discipline, and decided this was a good place to put it in effect.

Abel looked at Summers appealingly. He found no sympathy there. Austin wheeled his horse and galloped toward the head of the moving column.

"Do as you are told!" Summers growled as he galloped

after Austin, still followed by Abel. "You'll have to obey orders from now on. Don't just follow me around."

"I won't!" Abel bit off the words as he pulled rein and began looking up and down the line for Milam. "I've followed you too far already."

3

The line of march lay out over a high prairie. Before noon the riders became impatient over the delays caused by the slow-footed oxen dragging the cannon. But slow as they were, the wooden axles of the improvised gun carriage began smoking. Then the oxen would be halted, water poured on the axles, and again the oxen prodded into a trot in order to catch up with the mounted riflemen who were beginning to be a little scornful of the piece. By the time the gap had been closed the axles would again be smoking.

On Sandy Creek, at Austin's orders, the gun was abandoned, but when the troops again moved forward the cannon flag was still flying at the head of the column. They considered the invitation still good even though the object of dispute had come to an ignominious end.

On the second day they reached Cibolo Creek. Here Abel, who had been scouting ahead with a small force under Milam, rejoined the main body with the report that they had spied upon a large body of Mexican cavalry, which Milam thought had been sent out from Bexar as scouts.

Austin at once decided to pitch camp on the banks

of Cibolo Creek and there await further reinforcements. This did not please the command. They became restive. They had confidence in their own numbers, and the delay irked them. For four days Austin held them in hand, looking in vain for the arrival of additional volunteers.

On the evening of the fourth day Abel again came riding into camp, jubilant with the news that a small body of the scouts had encountered a group of Mexican cavalry and had put them to flight. He avowed that if the rest of the Mexican soldiers were like those he had encountered thus far, three hundred Americans could whip all of Mexico without sweating a hair.

This good news spread quickly and Austin knew he could no longer hold his men in check. Another messenger arrived from Milam, stating that he had selected a strong position on Salado Creek, some five miles out of Bexar, which in case of attack could be better defended than the present camp on Cibolo.

Austin accordingly began the march to Salado Creek, having first sent couriers back along the Gonzales road to urge all volunteers to make haste.

All through the long night the army pressed forward, keeping in constant communication with Milam's scouts. Near daybreak they made camp on the Salado. On the march several enemy outposts were encountered but they retired before the Texans came within gunshot range.

As the army was making camp, two very valuable recruits were added to the list. Bowie and "Deaf" Smith, both residents of Bexar, joined Austin's command. Smith, a noted scout, knew every inch of the country around Bexar. Austin at once dispatched him to aid

Milam, while Bowie was attached to the main command.

Although an enemy outpost was clearly visible on a hilltop between the Salado and Bexar, Austin refused to make any further advance until his numbers were increased. He had received a few additional men on the way up from the Cibolo, but they in no way strengthened his cause. Among these was a tall, powerfully built man, wearing a gaudy sash about his middle and with a small bright blanket thrown over his shoulders.

The giant of destiny had arrived.

But instead of walking like a giant, Houston at once began voicing his opposition to any further advance. He favored the abandonment of the campaign until such time as the untrained citizens could be properly trained. He advised falling back beyond the Guadalupe, there to await the establishment of a temporary form of government which could function in providing the army with reinforcements, supplies and at least some artillery.

Dissension at once broke out in the camp. The wise and the cautious were with Houston. Here was a man, they argued, who knew how to go about getting ready for war. With their present force, and want of artillery, they could not hope to capture the strongly fortified town of San Antonio de Bexar and the stronghold of the Alamo. Here was a man, argued the wise and the cautious, who should be in command of the army.

Their arguments found strong rebuttal among the hotspurs. Who was Houston anyhow? they asked. Where had he been when they put the Mexicans to flight at Gonzales? Had he heard of what Collingsworth had done at Goliad? Why, once they got within rifle range

the Mexicans would never stop running until they crossed the Rio Grande. This man Houston was either a politician or a coward—or both. He ought to be ridden on a rail. For what purpose did he think they had marched all this distance? Artillery be damned! They had left one lumbering old gun over on Sandy Creek because it only served to slow them up.

So they argued until the entire command became a debating society. In the midst of all this Austin paraded the army and delivered an address in which he set out the purpose of the army and his confidence in it, though admitting the country to be in a disorganized state. He proposed to send delegates from the army back to San Felipe, there to meet with other delegates for the purpose of perfecting a military organization.

Then Houston arose. Fearlessly he pointed out their weaknesses and made a strong appeal for delay. His speech availed him nothing. The army had not come all this way to listen to speeches.

That night Summers, Abel, Bowie and "Deaf" Smith sat near a small camp fire, playing a game of Old Sledge. Smith was a burly, squat man with the torso of a muscle-bound blacksmith. He rarely had anything to say and heard only so much as he wished to hear.

"What's all this talk about givin' up and goin' back?" Abel asked, holding a card aloft in readiness to follow Bowie's lead.

"Play your card!" Summers answered.

Abel threw down his cards in disgust.

"I'll play nothin'!" he retorted. "Ever' time I ask a question I'm told to do somethin'. I've wore myself

out gittin' here and now they're talkin' about goin' back. I don't mind bein' sent out ahead as a sort of target fer Mexicans to practice on, but I mind a man like Houston comin' in on the tail end and tryin' to wag the dog. I've got a right to know what's goin' on. *You* tell me about it," he turned to Bowie. "All I ever git out of Will is 'come on' or 'go on.' "

Bowie tried to spread light on the situation. Smith, never interested in conversation, arose and walked over to another game.

Bowie's explanation did not satisfy Abel. He became particularly resentful when Bowie informed him that a number of men, including Houston, were returning to San Felipe for the purpose of establishing some form of government.

"Gover'mint be damned!" Abel exploded. "What we come here fer was to lick the Mexicans. The minute we git in sight of them a whole passel of us git interested in goin' back to talk about gover'mint. What we need is more action and less talk. That's a mighty safe place back there in San Felipe to do the talkin'. I've got some cotton back there what needs pickin' bad and I'm goin' back to pick it!" He arose and kicked a stick into the fire. "I'm through!" he said with great decision. "I'm goin' back and help form the gover'mint." So saying, he turned and walked over to where his horse was picketed just beyond the circle of firelight.

Summers calmly began picking up the scattered cards.

"There'll be more deserting just like he is if Austin doesn't take a firmer hold," Bowie said.

"Deserting?" Summers said in surprise. Then he

laughed. "You don't know Abel. Right this minute he's on his way up to the outpost."

4

Austin had the good sense to know that in severing General Cos's line of retreat he had half won a battle not yet begun. He listened to all of Houston's arguments, but held steadfastly to his purpose. Houston, at last despairing of working his will, left camp with the other delegates from the army and made his way back to San Felipe.*

Austin at once began tightening his lines around Bexar. He first moved his army forward to a temporary position at the Mission Espada. Then he ordered Bowie and Fannin, with a company of nearly a hundred men, to move forward and select a new site as near the town as was practicable. They were to do this with all speed, so that the army could be moved forward before the coming of night, for the position at the Mission Espada was poorly suited to defense in case of attack.

Summers had asked to be allowed to join Bowie in this enterprise, and Austin consented. Abel and two other

*A convention of delegates from the various departments had been called for a meeting at San Felipe for the purpose of establishing a provisional form of government. Houston was a delegate from the department of Nacogdoches, and many men now with the army had been chosen to represent the various departmental jurisdictions. Austin had been chosen as a delegate from San Felipe, department of the Brazos, but while he recognized the need of a form of government, and urged the other delegates to quit the field and return to San Felipe and there take up legislative duties, he himself refused to turn back at this time. His heart was upon the capture of San Antonio de Bexar and he thought it unwise to quit the army at this hour of crisis.

scouts joined the company a little beyond the Mission Espada, advising Bowie that Cos himself was out reconnoitering and had been sighted across the river.

"How strong a body?" Bowie asked. He was extremely contemptuous of Mexican courage and was not to be deterred from his mission.

"About two hundred," Abel told him.

"I'd like to meet them," Bowie responded tersely as he pushed forward.

It was late evening before he and Fannin had decided upon a site at a bend of the river about five or six hundred yards from the old Mission Concepcion. The position offered splendid advantages for resisting attack. It now being too late in the evening for Austin to move forward, Bowie decided to disregard his order and to make camp for the night. Accordingly he dispatched a messenger to Austin, advising him of this decision. Then he set about disposing of his command in such fashion as to insure the greatest possible advantage in case of a surprise attack. Pickets were posted and every precaution taken. The men not on duty as pickets bedded down for the night.

It was a night in late October and the bottom lands were chill. Shortly after nightfall a heavy fog began to lift from the river, and this in no way added to the comfort of the men. Summers and Abel, by pooling their blankets and gathering several armfuls of tall grass, succeeded in making a fairly comfortable bed.

Throughout the night Abel was restless. Two or three times he arose and walked over to the picket line. By two o'clock in the morning the fog had become so

dense that objects a few feet away were indiscernible. This served to increase Abel's apprehension. The fourth time he arose, Summers growled complaint.

"Either go to bed or stay up," he said, sleepily. "What's the matter with you?"

"I don't like it here," Abel answered. "If those Mexican patrols weren't blind this afternoon they could see us makin' camp. If they saw us, and don't surround us under the cover of this fog, then I'll say they ain't lookin' fer a fight."

"Well, it's three hours before daylight," Summers replied. "Get under the blankets."

"Three hours ain't so long if they're your last," Abel commented succinctly and again made a trip to one of the outpost positions.

5

At dawn the camp was wrapped in a thick blanket of fog. Men moved through it like spectres, looming up with a startling suddenness and a moment later disappearing like magic.

Abel and Summers were busy rolling their blankets when from somewhere directly in front of Fannin's company a rifle shot sounded. This was at once answered by a number of shots in front of Bowie's company.

Abel dropped his end of the blanket and reached for his rifle.

"Uh-huh!" he said knowingly. "They've at least got sense! They're on all sides, or I'm a Dutchman!"

The firing increased, but it accomplished nothing more

than a waste of powder. Bowie was everywhere, arranging the positions and encouraging the men.

"Hold your fire," he ordered when one or two men fired into the thick wall of fog. "They won't attack until the fog lifts. Let them waste their powder."

The firing ceased as abruptly as it had begun. The silence became ominous. The Texans were straining their eyes in an effort to penetrate the fog. No one could tell what was going on beyond that white, thick curtain.

As the minutes passed and nothing happened, Bowie seized upon the delay to further strengthen his position. The lines were so formed that they could rake the enemy from whatever direction he might attack, and at the same time were held in a compact body so that they might be shifted from one line to another without great loss of time.

When at last the fog lifted, the Texans knew they were surrounded. Fortunately, however, their position was such that the enemy could not well attack from all sides at once. As the sun began to burn up the fog the Mexican infantry, supported by several companies of cavalry, began an advance against the right flank. They considered this the best point for attack.

Summers and Abel were in the division facing their advance.

"God A-mighty! There's more'n a million!" Abel said, nervously fingering his rifle lock.

At once the advancing Mexicans began blazing away, but the range was too great for the fire to have any effect. Seeing a cavalryman galloping along in front of the

advancing troops, Abel lifted his rifle and took careful, deliberate aim.

"Hold your fire!" Summers warned.

The crack of Abel's rifle was his answer. The horseman swayed uncertainly in his saddle, then pitched headlong to the ground.

Abel glanced quickly at Summers, a little gleam of triumph in his eye. "Hold nothin'!" he said. "I know when to begin shootin'."

The Texans all along that flank opened fire. It was not a salvo, but the slow, deliberate fire of men purposing no waste of ammunition. The advancing Mexicans wavered under the first shock, reformed and again moved forward, firing wildly. Not a single Mexican bullet had yet found a mark. Within fifty yards of the Texans they wavered under the steady, deadly fire. A brass bound six-pounder was rushed up to their support and spewed forth a round of grape. The aim was hasty and inflicted no damage. As the cannoneers were re-loading, Abel shouted to Summers:

"Take the swabber, Will! I'll take the gunner."

The swabber fell in his tracks; the gunner pitched sprawling across the gun carriage. Others sprang forward to take their places but the Texans concentrated their fire there and the gun was cleared of all tenders.

The infantry began to fall back. Mounted officers rode up and down, sabres flashing as they tried to stem the tide of retreat. Several of these pitched from their saddles. Their frightened, riderless horses went galloping wildly through the scattering troops.

Another cannon swung into position. The accurate

fire of the Texans cleared it of servers before it could fire a shot. Others again sprang forward to take their places.

"The cannon! Clear the cannon!" The cry ran up and down the line of Texas riflemen and the cannoneers dropped as fast as they moved up to the piece.

To the rear a bugle sounded the clear note of the charge. The Mexican infantry, now spiritless, made one more feeble effort to advance. But they had no stomach for such accuracy of fire. In a few minutes they were rushing headlong for cover.

It was the beginning of a precipitate retreat. No effort was made to save the cannon. Escape was their compelling urge.

A wild cheering began in the Texan lines. Many were for rushing out in pursuit, but Bowie and Fannin held them fast, confident that so large a force would regain courage and return to the attack.

The fleeing Mexicans, however, had in mind only the safety to be found within the fortifications of Bexar.

When Bowie was certain that the retreat had become a rout, he began chafing. He had lost but one man, killed, and none wounded, while the losses of the Mexican force totaled nearly a hundred. If Austin were only here they could pursue the fleeing Mexicans and cut them to pieces, but Bowie wisely decided that his own force was too small to abandon the advantage of position.

An hour later Austin arrived with his entire command. Surveying the field, he at once ordered pursuit.

"Follow them right into town!" he shouted. "It will be ours in an hour!"

Bowie hastened to him. "It's too late now, General," he protested. "An hour ago we could have bagged them, but not now. The town is strongly fortified and mounted cannon will cover their confusion."

"We can take the town before they get reorganized," Austin replied. He was elated. "We must follow them! The victory is ours!"

"It is," Bowie calmly answered, "and it has cost us only one man. But if we rush into town and try to penetrate their works without suitable tools and cannon, it will cost us dearly. I know the town, General; I know what we would have to face. We have them bottled up now. We must wait for reinforcements. Throw your lines around the town and you can starve them into surrender without losing a man."

Fannin now came forward and added his arguments to Bowie's. Reluctantly, Austin accepted their advice and at once set about strengthening the position and arranging for plans of operation calculated to annoy the enemy and keep them within the town.

The army was jubilant. Maybe Houston would change his tune when he heard of this.

Into camp next day came the companies from East Texas, well armed and equipped, and bringing the news that a company from Louisiana was on the way with a twelve-pounder.

Summers and Abel, hearing that the Nacogdoches company was moving up, galloped back to meet them. Their re-union with Buell and Bullard was ground for celebration. Abel loudly complained over the fact that his gourd canteen held nothing but water.

"You've come too late to have any of the fun," he told Lon that night as they sat around a small camp fire, exchanging experiences and accounting for the lapse of time since their parting. "We've licked 'em! It's all over except cleanin' up the mess."

"It seems to me you've only driven the rat in the hole," Lon answered. "I think there'll be plenty of fun smoking him out."



Chapter Six

THE DARK HOURS

I

TIME proved Lon correct in his guess that the rat had only been driven into the hole and that the real difficulty would be in smoking him out. Reinforcements failed to arrive. As time dragged on, hot blood cooled under the unexciting tedium of riding patrol and waiting for the enemy to get hungry enough to lift the white flag.

Dissension again broke out. Many of the volunteers wanted to return home to salvage what they could from their unharvested crops. Days passed into weeks, with only one small skirmish to whet the appetite of the command. Austin was learning that an army in the field, when faced with inaction, turns its mind toward home.

In late November word came that the New Orleans Greys, bringing with them the much talked of twelve-pounder, would arrive in camp the following day. Austin knew it was now or never.

He promptly issued an order to the several commands to prepare for an attack upon the town. It was then that he discovered he had waited too long. Courage and confidence had been replaced by doubt and fear. Many of the officers, advising against the move, boldly stated that they would not join in so hazardous an undertaking.

Surprised by such flat refusal, Austin made a canvas of the army to determine its temper and found that someone had planted the seeds of fear and insubordination.

His disappointment was keen. He was faced with the necessity of returning to San Felipe to assist in the formation of the government and in raising volunteers. His great hope had been to lead in the capture of the town. Now he must turn over the command to another, despite his fear that it would mean the abandonment of the siege and the retirement of the army at the very time when victory seemed assured.*

Wounded to the heart, he turned over the command to Burleson and began the long ride back to San Felipe. He could carry with him no news of victory to bolster up his appeals for more volunteers.

The day Austin left, Abel again promptly quit. With Burleson in command he knew there was small chance for a fight. He contended that a hundred men were

*Austin's decision to leave the army and return to San Felipe was brought about by his fear that the delegates in convention would be swayed by the radical group and declare independence. He still held the view that the convention should do no more than utter a declaration that they intended to stand upon the rights granted them under the constitution of 1824. This move, he thought, would make their position impregnable. He now felt that his presence at the convention was imperative. Thinking it wise to permit the command to choose his successor, he called an election and the army selected Col. Edward Burleson as commander-in-chief.

As a matter of fact, the convention at San Felipe had already completed its labors and had established a provisional government with Henry Smith as Governor. They had adjourned, to meet again on March 1 of the following spring. Before adjourning they had elected Sam Houston as commander-in-chief of the regular army, had enacted certain laws pertaining to the military and had given Houston free rein in the matter of creating a military organization. Thus the one time governor of Tennessee began his way back up the road to fame. Character, the only thing ever needed by a bright destiny, had again lifted him into the saddle.

quite enough to take the town, but his arguments fell on deaf ears. He got no comfort from Lon or Summers, who were far too angry and disappointed to trust their tongues. Buell seemed to have no interest beyond caring for those who were suffering from maladies brought on by exposure and want of proper food.

Two weeks after Austin's departure, Burleson determined to abandon the siege and fall back into winter quarters at Gonzales. He at once issued the order to break camp. In the confusion of this hour, Abel stalked around loudly voicing what many were thinking.

"I'll spend no winter in Gonzales," he declared again and again to any who would stop to listen. "With me it's either fight or go home. By the time spring comes Burleson won't have enough men left in his army to rob a chicken roost. He's bin scared off by a few cannon. What if they have got cannon? They can't hit anything with 'em!"

There were still some two hundred men in the command with the same ideas and courage. Their growls of resentment swelled into a loud chorus.

Milam, appointing himself as the leader of this faction, went to Burleson's quarters to protest against the retreat. His arrival there was coincident with that of a Mexican deserter who reported to Burleson that the defenses of the town were weak, the soldiers discouraged and the supplies low. Still Burleson hesitated.

Milam saw his chance. "General," he said, "you are in command of a gallant company of men. Many of them do not want to turn back. This is the time to call for volunteers to take the town."

Burleson, thinking such a call would serve to convince the hot spurs that the great majority stood with him, replied: "Very well, sir! Now is the proper time."

Milam turned to the men crowding round. In a loud, strong voice he shouted:

"Who will go with old Ben Milam into San Antonio?"

"I will!" came a ringing chorus.

"Then fall in line!" Milam called.

Abel jumped a full three feet forward, his coonskin cap impaled on the end of his rifle as he shouted: "Come on, boys! There's roofs and feathers and whiskey in town and nothin' but open sky 'tween here and Gonzales. Let's sleep in a bed by to-morrow night!"

Over two hundred men stepped forward. Abel craned his neck to look down the forming line. Side by side stood Summers, Lon and Buell.

"And a doctor to patch you up if you git shot gittin' yore bed," Abel added, jubilantly.

2

At three o'clock the following morning a detachment of Texans under Col. Neill crossed the river with a single piece of artillery. At dawn they began an assault upon the Alamo, diverting the attention of the enemy so that Milam's riflemen could effect an entrance to the town.

The attack soon resolved itself into a type of warfare in which the Texans showed to the greatest advantage. Two or three houses within rifle range of the Mexican position were stormed and taken, and from this cover they set up a deadly fire upon the next strong point.

Cos had divided his army into two divisions; one division occupying the Alamo, the other strongly entrenched in the town. The Texans had one great objective—to drive the enemy from the town and force him back into the Alamo. From house to house they made their way, availing themselves of all possible cover and picking off the enemy sharpshooters stationed on the house tops and behind entrenchments.

Summers, Abel and Bullard kept close together during the day. The skill acquired in the woods and in the shooting matches back at The Forks was now bearing a red harvest. But the progress was slow all along the line. The Mexicans, holding the advantage of position, were putting up a determined resistance.

Buell had established a makeshift hospital in one of the houses first taken. By nightfall of the first day several dangerously wounded men were under his care.

Abel had captured a bed at the end of the day, but he was not to sleep in it. That night he toiled with the others, throwing up breastworks in order to hold what had been gained.

For the next two days the Texans made what progress they could, advancing from house to house and all the while tightening their lines and drawing nearer the plaza.

During the afternoon of the third day of fighting, Ben Milam was killed as he attempted to cross an open space between two houses. A Mexican rifleman had made a good shot, but in so doing sealed his own doom. Someone would have to pay for Ben Milam! The Texans, with grim resolution, at once set about collecting.

From the moment Milam fell, their fire never slack-

ened. With battering rams of heavy logs they smashed down doors, capturing and killing, fighting with the knife and with clubbed muskets, and all the while drawing nearer and nearer the plaza.

Night fell, but the fighting continued. There was the constant rattle of musketry, punctuated now and then by the deep throated roar of Mexican artillery.

Near midnight a small group of men at last forced their way into a house located in the square. It was a splendid vantage point. The enemy, angered by the loss of this position, began a furious cannonading. Muskets rattled incessantly.

The fire of the Mexicans was largely a matter of noise. The Texans responded, but only when they were sure of their fire. They inflicted heavy losses, while sustaining but one fatality in their own forces.

Bullard received a slight scalp wound in helping take a house near the plaza. He refused to go back for any surgical aid, holding his place by Abel's side near a small window where they could fire at the stabbing points of light coming from the enemy lines.

They were holding this position when dawn came.

With the coming of light the Texans increased their fire, while the Mexicans, strangely, decreased theirs.

Abel and Bullard, peeping from cover, were eagerly watching for a target. Summers kneeled at another window, his long rifle poked menacingly through the opening.

"Look yonder!" Abel called, recklessly exposing himself as he pointed through the window. "By dogs! It's a white flag. Look, Will! Look!"

"I see," Summers answered, his rifle covering the man who had lifted the flag above the Mexican position.

"I reckon that's another parley," Abel commented. "When things git hot these Mexicans are long on parleyin'. And while they're tryin' to talk their way out of the mess they'll be primin' their guns."

"I think they've got enough," Lon said, and for the first time began examining the wound on the side of his head.

"You mean they'll quit?" Abel asked.

"I think so," Lon answered.

Abel's eyes danced with delight. "Then we can go back home."

"Not yet," Summers spoke up. "They may quit but that doesn't end the war. We'll have to stay here and hold what we have won. Santa Anna still has an army."

"What we've won!" Abel snorted. "A bunch of rock and clay houses with the doors and roofs smashed in and the streets all tore up. What do we want to hold it fer?"

"It is the strongest point in Texas," Summers answered.

"There are strong points nearer home," Abel retorted. "Look here, Will! If that flag means that they're goin' to surrender, do you mean to tell me you aim to stick around here all winter?"

"If we are needed here, yes."

"We?" Abel echoed. "You can jes' leave out the we! I'm sick and tired of followin' around after a bullhead. I'm goin' back home. And this is the last

time I'm goin' to say that without doin' it. Come on, Lon, let's go out and see what's goin' on."

2

The truce ended in surrender. General Cos had had quite enough of Texan rifle fire. The country south of the Rio Grande had become suddenly inviting. Life was a precious thing. If he could save his own neck and those of his troops by a surrender of arms and munitions, it was decidedly preferable to dying like rats.

Burleson's terms of capitulation were promptly accepted. What mattered it, Cos reasoned, that he must agree to retire beyond the Rio Grande under parole never again to take up arms against Texas? He who fights and runs away will live to fight another day. The matter of parole was of little consequence. Santa Anna, his brother-in-law and chief, would understand that a promise made at the point of a rifle is no promise at all. Santa Anna would accept it as evidence establishing a claim to good sense.

So reasoning, Cos signed the articles of capitulation, including the none too embarrassing clause of parole. A few days later he rode out of town at the head of his army, leaving San Antonio de Bexar in the hands of the hated Americans.

His army had not retired beyond the Rio Grande before confusion laid hold of his conquerors. Many of them, having accomplished the purpose for which they had set out, now turned their faces homeward. In responding to the call for volunteers they had made no

promises as to the length of their service. The enemy had been expelled. It was now time to take up peaceful pursuits. The harvesting of crops had been abandoned when they took the field. That was loss enough. Spring must find them again behind the plow in an effort to make up for what had been lost.

Burleson, having dispatched riders to San Felipe and Washington with news of the capture of San Antonio, at once set about disbanding the army, with the exception of a small garrison who expressed a willingness to remain in San Antonio and occupy it until such time as they could be relieved by other colonists.

Abel at once presented arguments for an immediate return to San Felipe. Bullard, fearing that Santa Anna would march north in an effort to regain what Cos had lost, at once signified his intention of remaining in Bexar until peace was definitely established. Jeff Buell, occupied with the care of the sick and the wounded, turned a deaf ear to all of Abel's arguments favoring a return to San Felipe. Summers, as usual, kept his thoughts and his plans to himself.

On Christmas day a rider came from San Felipe bearing messages for the head of the army. He also brought several letters for the men. No man ever played a finer Santa Claus.

Jeff Buell was one of the fortunate ones to receive a letter, but as he read his smile changed to a look of deep distress. When he had finished reading he at once set out in search of Summers. He found him, in company with Abel, lounging against a wall in the plaza and dozing in the sunshine of a warm, mid-winter day.

Jeff touched Summers on the shoulder and beckoned him to one side.

"Will, Carolin's come," he announced.

"What!" Summers exclaimed, blinking as foolishly as one just coming out of a day dream. "Here? In Bexar?"

"I didn't mean here—I meant in San Felipe. I've just received a letter from her."

Summers was still trying to shake himself awake. The thing didn't make sense.

"She has been there over a month," he heard Jeff saying. "Austin told her I was here—with you."

"She mentioned me?" The words slipped out.

"Yes. Just think, Will! She has been there a month, yet she wouldn't write a word until she heard of our victory. That's Carolin, for you."

"What in the world is she doing there?" Summers asked, still doubting his ears.

"Didn't you write her that I was coming to San Felipe from Nacogdoches to join you?"

"Why—yes, months ago. But I only wanted her to know that everything was working out all right—for you."

"Working out as you wanted it to work out, Will, not as I had planned. You don't know Carolin very well, do you?"

"What do you mean?" Summers asked quickly.

"Did it ever occur to you that I was not writing her the whole truth? I kept telling her I was undecided where I would locate. I knew Carolin too well to risk that. But you upset the whole plan."

Summers looked exceeding blank and dull. "I don't understand what you mean," he said.

Jeff was exasperated. "You can be the dullest man—when you try. I suppose you never thought that Carolin would join me the minute she knew I was permanently located?"

"Not for a second!" Summers replied. "That's the truth, Jeff. I heard her say, many times, that she hated the sound of the name Texas. And she said a dozen times that she didn't intend to do any pioneering."

Jeff shook his head sadly. "I say it again, Will: You can be mighty stupid when you try. Didn't you know she was only talking against the thing she feared? Couldn't you see it was because she knew she would make the sacrifice if she was brought face to face with it? . . . No, you wouldn't see that. A woman is beyond your comprehension."

"I guess that's right," Summers answered, feeling suddenly weak. Then quickly, "You've got to start back, Jeff—at once. Where is she staying there?"

"She said in the letter that she had bought a little frame house and had moved in."

"Alone?"

"Oh, no! Old Aunt Chloe is with her. But she must be lonely—and worried sick. I can't leave right now. The wounded men, and the sick ones, need me. It's different with you, Will. You can go."

Summers took a step backward. "I? Why, what could I do? You are crazy, Jeff! You must go back. At once!"

"I tell you I can't go away and leave these men.

Think, Will! This is Christmas day. There isn't a soul there in the world, except old Chloe, who cares a snap for her. Remember the Christmas day at our house, two years ago?"

Summers nodded. He did not dare trust his voice.

"She must be mighty lonely—and mighty brave." Buell went on. "She is used to having a lot of people around. You've got to go back and see that she is getting along all right."

Summers shook his head. "She came here to find you, Jeff. There is precious little I could do."

"Oh, yes, she came to find me, but it wasn't *my* letter that told her where she would find me. Look here, Will! Are you going to be bullheaded all of your life?"

"What could I do?" Summers asked, ignoring the question.

"For one thing, you can carry the word to her that I'll be there just as soon as I can leave these men. For another, you can let her know that *I*, at least, think she is a brave girl."

He watched the effect of this last statement. The shot had gone home, but there was still an uncompromising set to Summers' lips.

"Up in Nacogdoches," Jeff went on, "you once asked me to stay behind and care for a friend when it was your duty to go on. You said that duty and friendship must be served first. Now it is my duty to stay here and it is your duty to serve friendship. The situation is just reversed."

Without a word Summers turned and walked over to shake Abel out of his nap.

"Wake up, Abel!" he said. "Wake up! We're starting for San Felipe."

Abel awoke with alacrity. "Are you joshin' me, Will?"

"No. Where's Lon?"

"Eatin' Christmas dinner with that family of Mexicans he's bin hob-nobbin' with. Lon beats all. I believe he could make friends with a snake."

"He could," Buell agreed fervently.

"You know where the house is?" Summers asked.

"Shore. It's down by the river. Lon was fer takin' me along but I can't fight with a man one day and eat with him the next, like Lon can. Danged if I don't think——"

"Go find him," Summers interrupted curtly, "and tell him we are leaving here this afternoon."

"Wait a minute!" Buell put in. "Are you expecting him to go with you, Will?"

"Of course."

"But you know he has said he would stay here until he is sure the trouble's over. Besides, he doesn't want to go to San Felipe. He'll go back to Nacogdoches as soon as he can."

"That's nonsense!" Summers retorted. "San Felipe is a much better town."

"For you, perhaps," Buell answered, "but not for Lon. I know some things you don't know."

"What are they?"

Buell shook his head and smiled. "Will, there are some things in this world beyond your management. You can't control all of the actions in everybody's life, you know."

"Wel—1," Abel drawled, "I'll tell you about that, Doc. He kin come as clost to it as any man I ever seen."

3

Abel had just ground for complaint on the ride back to San Felipe. Summers was more silent than ever. He was looking ahead to the meeting with Carolin; wondering what she would have to say; trying to fashion replies to the censure he felt sure would be heaped upon him. He carried a letter from Jeff, together with the verbal assurance that Jeff would come on as soon as possible. Even so, would this satisfy her? She had given up the things she had loved to follow Jeff into a life she despised, or at least feared. Beyond doubt she would think Jeff had been influenced by the very man she had welcomed to their home.

Summers knew there was little he could say. He could not tell her that Jeff had come on the trail of Gant, a trail that was now lost and, seemingly, almost forgotten. So far as that angle of the thing was concerned Sally would still have the monument of silence.

He could tell her the reason for his own coming, but beyond that he could not go.

These were the thoughts that silenced him along the way and caused him to sit moodily before the camp fire at night, staring into the fire with eyes that saw only the pictures of past days. He heard nothing that Abel had to say.

The horses were not spared on that trip. They had left Bexar before sunup the day after Christmas; they

reached the inn at San Felipe in time for supper on the third day. At least it was supper time for Abel.

Summers, however, had no thought for food. He went to the room assigned them and began washing the dust of the journey from his hands and face. That finished, he stood looking down at his soiled buckskin shirt and breeches. They bore the marks of campaigning. He glanced in the small mirror. What a different man from the one who used to stand before the mirror in the room back in Washington! How he used to preen himself on those evenings when he was invited to the Buells'. Then it was broadcloth and fawn colored trousers. Yes, but then it was a woodsman making a silly effort to look like a city bred lawyer. Now he stood in the clothing of a woodsman back from the wars. So attired, he must go out and face a woman who had small patience with the ideas of hardship and pioneering.

With lagging steps he turned from the room and went out on the street. A townsman, answering his inquiries, directed him to the house where Carolin lived. Slower and slower lagged his feet as he approached it. A single candle glowed through the window.

At the gate he stopped, lacking the courage to go on. How different it was from the stately old house back in Virginia. He remembered the trees in the lawn, remembered what he had said to Major Langstone the first evening he saw the place. The old Buell place was suited to one with a light heart. He had so stated, and the Major had called him a mooning fool. But this drab frame house before him was not suited to play. No one, who had known better things, could be light-hearted here.

Standing there at the picket gate, Summers was trying to visualize Carolin in such surroundings. It was like putting a jewel in a crude pine box. He suddenly remembered the flowers that grew on the limitless prairies; remembered, too, the woman he had seen in Smith's squalid cabin on Hurricane Creek. That was what the prairies did to flowers.

He passed through the gate and lifted his hand to rap on the door. Again he hesitated. She would wither him with a look.

His knock was sharp and decisive. He must not let the fear of a woman's look keep him from a duty.

A white-haired negro woman, nearly as round as she was tall, peeped cautiously through the crack of a partly opened door.

Poor old Chloe, Summers thought, she, too, was faced with the fear of a wild, hard country filled with wild, hard men.

"Who's dah?" Chloe demanded.

"Is Miss Buell at home?" Summers asked.

"I axed who's dah?"

Summers stepped over into the beam of light streaming through the partly opened door.

"Don't you remember me, Aunt Chloe? Mr Summers—who used to be down at Washington?"

The door flew wide open. "Lawd God! Sarvent, mars-ter. Come right in! I cain' see so well 'cause we bin lookin' our eyes out fer you an' Marse Jeff. Whur is Marse Jeff? Cayolin!" She turned and called, shrilly. "Oh, Miss Cayolin! Look here, honey, who's come home!"

There came the sound of fluttering skirts and hurrying footsteps. A moment later Carolin entered the room, her eyes dancing in the soft glow of candle light. One look at her and Summers knew that no matter what the surroundings, she would always be a patrician. A jewel in a pine box, indeed!

She curtsied as Summers bowed. The form followed, she became all animation.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you!" she exclaimed. "And you haven't changed a bit! Where's Jeff?"

There was the dreaded question. Now where were the words he had fashioned for reply?

"I've a letter from him," Summers answered. Realizing that this was a stupid answer to her question, he began all over again. "He couldn't leave just the minute he got your letter. There were some wounded men, and several who were sick. Jeff felt he couldn't come until he had them patched up."

"Of course not!" Carolin agreed. "I didn't say a word to him about coming—at least not until he thought he should. But do sit down. I have so many things to ask you—so many things to talk about."

Summers found courage to look in her eyes. She wasn't saying any of the things he had imagined.

As he seated himself he glanced down at his soiled buckskins, then across at her flowered dress. He felt like a small boy surprised at playing in the mud. He began to hope she would say a few of the things he had expected. He felt that he deserved them.

"You can't imagine how we rejoiced here when we heard of the victory at San Antonio," she told him

eagerly. "I was frightened, when Mr Austin first told me that you and Jeff were there, but I have been feeling mighty proud since the news came."

"Jeff has done some fine work," Summers replied. "You have good reason to be proud of him."

"Austin said the same of you," she declared. "He said there wasn't a better, braver rifle in the army." Seeing how this embarrassed Summers, she added hurriedly: "And he told me some of the funniest things about that man who was with you. Who is he?"

"I suppose you mean Abel," Summers answered. "He furnished some amusement for the army, although he didn't know he was doing it."

"Jeff wrote me about him. He came from Tennessee with you, didn't he?"

Summers nodded. Now she was starting back into the history of the thing. Her next question, however, indicated that she had no intention of probing further in that direction.

"Tell me," she said earnestly, "is Jeff really a good doctor?"

"He certainly is! He has made a name for himself with the army."

"Isn't that fine!" she enthused. "Now he can come back here and feel he is entitled to the confidence of the people. I'm sure he can build up a good practice."

Summers caught his breath and sank back in his chair. "You mean here?" he asked.

"Yes, of course! Didn't you say this was a good town? Isn't he planning on starting up here?"

"Why, yes—that is—Oh, no! He is going back to

Washington. I heard him say he was going back." It was a bold lie. As usual, he was planning what he wanted to come about.

Carolyn's brows contracted into a puzzled frown. "Back to Washington? Why should he go back there?"

"Because of—that is, I don't think he likes it here."

"But he hasn't been here—in San Felipe," she protested. "I'm sure he will like it. Besides, we can't go back to our old home now."

"Why not?" Summers asked in surprise.

"Because I sold the place. Everything we have in the world is right here—except a little money Major Langstone is holding for us."

Summers felt suddenly cold. His eyes turned to the fire crackling in the fireplace. It offered him no warmth. He was chilled to the marrow by the blast of his own folly.

Carolyn was quick to see his distress. "You think I shouldn't have done it?" she asked. As he sought words she went on, "It wasn't as much of a sacrifice as you think. We had lived beyond our income. Jeff knew it all the time. That's why he wanted to go where he could find people with some confidence in his ability. But I was foolish. Oh, yes I was," she hurried on as he lifted a hand in protest. "I didn't want to give up what I had no right to enjoy. When—when Sally died, and poor Jeff left because he couldn't stand it there any longer, it opened my eyes. I knew then I would come the minute he wrote that he was established."

"Did you even wait for him to write you that?" Summers asked, still looking in the fire.

The answer was long in coming. A sidelong glance told him that she was in confusion.

"No, I didn't," she answered at last. "I could tell, from the way he wrote from Nacogdoches, that he would keep putting me off. He was too vague about what he intended doing, and that wasn't like Jeff. When you wrote me that he was coming here, I guessed you didn't know what he had been writing."

Summers forced a thin, mirthless smile. "You are a good guesser," he admitted. "It's all my fault. I should have kept quiet."

"Should you?" she asked pointedly. "Don't you think you kept silent long enough? You wrote just once. Surely I could expect that much from—from a friend. Do you remember that you did not even let me know you were leaving Washington? I had to get the facts out of Major Langstone."

Summers shifted uneasily. He found it difficult to meet her eyes.

"The Major told me all about it," she continued. "He excused your actions on the ground that you never let your left hand know what your right hand was doing."

"He told you about—my brother's death?" Summers asked.

"Yes. And I have learned more since I came here. I think it was wonderfully unselfish. Why didn't you want to tell me about it?"

"It was all I could do. I—I didn't want to talk about it. Let's not talk about it now. What do you intend to do here?"

"Live here, of course. I talked it all over with the

Major before I came and he said I was doing exactly right—for Jeff. Young men for new countries, he said. When Jeff gets back we can fix up this place and he can start practicing here. I'm sure he will get along first rate."

"That isn't the point," Summers said doggedly. "Of course he can get along. But what about you?"

"What about me?" she echoed, a note of piquancy in her voice. "Well, what about me?"

"You can't live here."

"No? Aren't there a great many women living here?"

Summers studied her face for a long minute. There was a determination there he had never seen before. She had the same beauty, the same rich, warm brown eyes, but they had become the windows to the soul and heart of a far different Carolin from the one he had known. There was courage there. Now, strangely, he did not want her to have to draw upon it, but he could not refrain from putting it to a little test.

"Yes, there are many women here," he answered, "but most of them are tired, work-worn, and with a look of hunger in their eyes; hungry for the things——" He broke off abruptly. With the toe of her slipper she was tracing the course of a pattern in the rag rug. He thought he saw moisture glistening on her lashes, and he inwardly rebuked himself.

"It was a long time ago when I said that," she said, her voice very low. "I am seeing things differently now. At any rate I have made up my mind. If Jeff likes it here, here we will stay. What do you intend to do, Will?"

He thrilled to his name. It was the first time she had

used it this evening. It recalled one evening back in Virginia when she had used it for the first time and he had been so very close to telling her what was in his heart. Dwelling in memory for the moment, he quite forgot her question.

"What do you intend to do?" she repeated.

"Go out on the farm with Abel, I suppose," he answered.

"That's foolish! After all you learned with Major Langstone? Why, you could be the best lawyer in the town."

"There are too many lawyers here now for what little work there is to do."

"Too many can never keep out the best," she responded. "I'm sure you are not going to waste what you have learned. This war will result in independence. There will be many opportunities here then."

Summers chuckled.

"What are you laughing at?" she demanded.

"Well, you see, Jeff sent me back to look after you and be of what help I could. I think both of us will have to turn to you for help."

It served to relieve the tension. Both of them had been cautiously feeling their way. Summers' statement served to put them on firmer ground.

For an hour they talked; Summers telling her incidents of the campaign against Bexar; she listening with the ears of a woman who searches for some hint of personal prowess with which to exalt her hero.

Later, as Summers walked back down the dark street to the inn, he thought the stars in the blue bowl of the

sky exceptionally bright this night. He attributed it to the clear, crisp weather.

4

The following morning Summers and Abel rode out to the farm. The cotton had long since been picked by the winds or beaten from the bolls by the heavy winter rains. The weeds and thickets at the edges of the field were white with it. It grieved Abel to see the harvest of his labor dissipated by prodigal winds, but he rejoiced over the fact that the long trail had at last turned back to their own roof and their own bed. Everything in the house was just as they had left it, save that a fine layer of dust had settled over all and there was the damp, woody smell so common to a log house long in disuse.

A fire was started, doors were thrown open, and the two men, in man-like fashion, set about re-establishing themselves. Abel went at it with the air of one who has his goal in sight, but Summers halted again and again, as one who is not sure of his purpose and ponders the advisability of continuing.

Every day, thereafter, Summers saddled his horse and rode into town to see that all was well with Carolin and to offer his help. He found old Chloe abundantly equal to the tasks imposed by a small, four-room house, and it just happened that her attention was always held by the kitchen from the moment he arrived until his departure.

Abel thought it strange that it took Summers so long to inquire into their health and to ask if any further word had come from Jeff. He wondered if these long

visits were in any way associated with the fact that Summers never asked him to ride along.

5

In the second week in January Jeff Buell rode into San Felipe. Old Chloe at once set about the preparation of a dinner for the following day, which she declared would be Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's all rolled into one.

Abel at last got his invitation. He protested that his buckskins were none too new, even though his appetite was a little above standard. He quickly abandoned the position when Summers reminded him that he himself had gone to Washington in buckskin and so attired had attended parties in the Buell home.

This settled the matter for Abel. He was seeking encouragement.

At first, Abel was something of a disappointment to Carolin. From the stories Summers and Jeff had told, she had expected some rare entertainment.

The sight of Carolin had awed Abel into silence. He had never seen a woman like this. Her dress made him all the more conscious of his buckskins. He watched her at such times as her attention was away from him. The high color under the thin skin of her cheeks, the white, soft hands, the indistinct yellow roses patterned in her dress—all made him feel that she was too exquisitely fragile for such surroundings. He noticed, however, that her very presence had a decided effect upon the simple furnishings of the house. They became mere background.

She was the point of interest, even for Abel. But he could think of nothing to say. Everything that came to mind seemed strangely out of place or inappropriate. He felt cramped. This feeling continued until, from the place where he was sitting, he saw old Chloe bringing a deliciously browned turkey to the dining room table. Then he began to feel expansive. After all, he had not come to talk. He could safely leave that detail to the others.

The dinner had a heartening effect upon him. He saw that it would not be difficult to talk to any woman who could offer him as many helpings as did Carolin. She was literally crowding stories out of him with food. His first effort met with such appreciation that he became greatly encouraged. Thereafter, for an hour, he recited incidents that Carolin would never have dragged from Jeff or Summers. It amused her the way both of them tried to shift the conversation when they felt that Abel was getting on dangerous ground. When he came to the story of Crenshaw, Summers made a valiant effort to shut him off, but Abel was not to be denied. With one part fact and nine parts fiction, he wove a story on the loom of his imagination that was as new to Summers as it was to Carolin.

When he had finished, Carolin clapped her hands in delight.

"You are a member of the household, Mr Roundtree. You see," she explained when she saw his look of bewilderment, "when Jeff and I lived back in Virginia, we used to make every new guest tell the most thrilling thing that had happened in his life. Remember, Will?"

Summers nodded. How well he remembered!

Carolyn turned back to Abel.

"When Mr Summers first came to our house, he wouldn't say a word about himself. Even then he had had that first meeting with Crenshaw. Colonel Crockett told me something about it, but not in detail as you gave it, Mr Roundtree."

"Will's bashful," Abel commented, ignoring Summers' glare. "We never could git him to talk about himself. He coulda run fer Congress back in Tennessee jest as well as Crockett, but he's too hard-headed to ask fer anything fer himself. That's why he's a batcheler. He coulda had any girl he wanted from the Obion to The Forks, but when there's wimmen around he's tongue-tied. I'm different that-a-way. Any time you've a meal like this to trade fer a story, about me or anybody else, I'm at yore service, ma'm."

Summers felt around under the table with his foot, trying to locate Abel's shin. Failing, he manfully laid hold of the conversation and guided it into safer channels.

On the way home that night Abel said:

"That woman's got no business bein' down here, Will. You'd ought to talk Jeff into makin' her go back to her home."

"It isn't as easy as it sounds," Summers answered. "Carolyn is the manager. She makes up her own mind and sticks to it."

Abel made a clicking sound with his tongue. "What a match!" he said under his breath.

"What did you say?" Summers demanded.

"Nothin'! I was jes' thinkin'. Jeff tells me you're goin' to start up lawin' in town."

"Did he? Hum-m. Well—I've been thinking about it. What do you think?"

Abel's face was a picture of surprise. "You well, Will?"

"Well? Certainly! Why?"

"Because that's the first time you ever ast me what I thought about anything. I think you'd ought to do it, though. I reckon there won't be so much goin' on at first but what you can find time to help me git in a crop. In the meantime, I'll do a little lookin' around myself. If I could do half as good as you've done I wouldn't be so put out about it."

"What do you mean?"

"Now, Will, there's no use to go beatin' the devil around the bush. I can see what's right in front of my nose. Jeff's sister can't keep her eyes offen you fer a minute. When a woman looks at a man the way she looks at you, he's a goner. We're fixin' to part company. All I ask is, if I don't make a ketch on my own hook please remember that I'm ionder of food, 'ceptin' my own cookin', than of anything else in the world."

Summers found silence less difficult than reply.

6

In February, Jeff and Summers rented a small frame building adjoining the old saloon and billiard hall of Cooper & Cheaves and by erecting a partition of native lumber divided the one large room into two offices. At

the door each nailed his sign and then sat back to await client and patient.

Summers found that Abel's prediction was correct. There was ample free time to help Abel with the tasks on the farm. Jeff found patients, even though older and better known doctors had long been established in the town. The practice of law, however, presented quite a different problem. The country was in a chaotic condition. No one sought redress for a wrong in courts which could not well establish their rights to existence. There were simpler, more direct ways. Besides, there was talk of calling a convention to be held at Washington, on the Brazos, for the establishment of a permanent form of government under a declaration of independence. Until then, just what was the law? Few asked, and fewer still sought lawyers.

This fact caused Summers no uneasiness. He had a far more difficult problem confronting him. War talk was again taking on a threatening, ominous note. It was rumored that Santa Anna was collecting his forces at San Juan Bautista, on the Rio Grande, for an expedition against San Antonio de Bexar, and it was said that Cos had joined him and was violating the parole he had signed at Bexar.

Not for a day, since the capture of Bexar by the Americans, had Travis and Fannin ceased their calls for volunteers. For a while Summers looked upon them as alarmists, and many colonists held with him. However, if Santa Anna was making preparation for an invasion, then it was high time for Texans to take action.

Summers found himself worrying a great deal about

Bullard. He had received no word from him. Was he still in Bexar, or had he made his way back to Nacogdoches? Even Abel was beginning to worry. Two or three times he had hinted to Summers that it might be wise for them to go back to Bexar. Summers was almost in agreement when one day Jeff, now alarmed at the increasing rumors, made the same proposal. That moment Summers knew beyond doubt that Carolin stood first in his heart. Not for a second could he consider the possibility of leaving her alone and he knew that if he rode west Jeff would insist upon going. At once he began to discount the alarming rumors.*

His lips spoke one thing and his heart another. A few citizens of San Felipe were making ready to answer the appeals which Travis was sending back. On the day of their departure, Summers' heart sank. He found it increasingly difficult to hold up his head. No one could understand his problem; no one could know how much there was at stake. He began to wonder if Carolin herself would not think his actions a little strange. Could it be possible that she was weighing *his* courage? Even so, he must stand by. He had already let her in for enough sacrifice.

Facing such a problem, time dragged. On the last day

*At this time both the military and civil affairs of Texas were in chaos. The provisional government had practically collapsed. Houston had established army headquarters at Washington, on the Brazos, and was faced with the task of creating an army at a time when the country was apathetic. Austin, Wharton and Archer, as commissioners of the provisional government, were now back in the States endeavoring to float a loan and arouse sympathy with the Texas cause. The army was in confusion and the units widely separated. The spring of 1836 was a dark hour for Texas.

of February a rider came from Bexar bearing the definite news that Santa Anna was marching toward that place. Summers sought out the courier to question him. The man reported that Bullard was still there and seemed more than happy over the arrival of Colonel Crockett, of Tennessee. Summers could not believe his ears. He asked the messenger to describe Crockett. Still unconvinced, he continued to express his doubt until the rider, in exasperation, said:

"If you don't believe he's there, maybe it 'ud be just as well for you to ride out there and see. They'll be needin' help bad enough, God knows! If a man's got any friends in Bexar he had better be showing his friendship."

Summers turned away, cut to the heart. He went directly to the office, where he found Buell.

"I'm leaving here to-morrow for Bexar," he announced. "I'll ride out to the farm to-night to get Abel."

"All right," Jeff answered. "I'll be ready when you come by in the morning."

"You'll be ready?" Summers echoed. "Don't be a fool, Jeff! You can't go away and leave Carolin here alone."

"I know it. But I can't stay behind when you go, either. I thought you said there wasn't any cause for alarm."

"A messenger from Bexar has just reached town," Summers answered. "He says Bullard is still there and that Crockett is there also."

Jeff jumped from his chair. "Crockett! Why, it's impossible! What would he be doing there?"

Summers shook his head. "I don't know, but I do know it isn't impossible. It wasn't impossible for us, was it? We're not the first ones nor the last to come to Texas. This is a mess that would suit Crockett to a T."

"Isn't it odd?" Buell said, musingly. "Who would have thought, two years ago, that we would all be out here now? Do you remember how we used to talk about it and——" he broke off suddenly. His eyes narrowed and his mouth became hard. He began pacing the floor. "How in the world am I ever going to find Gant now that Carolin has come?" he asked.

"That isn't the question now, Jeff. There are other things more important."

"Other things? Yes! For a year there have been other things. Always something standing in the way; always something that must be done first. I'm sick and tired of *other things*! I would rather see Gant dead than see Texas independent. I'd rather——"

"Wait a minute, Jeff! Texas will never gain independence if Texans do not answer the call to arms. It is my duty to go to Bexar; it is yours to stay here with Carolin."

Jeff wheeled on him. "Duty! Duty! You're always pointing out the other fellow's duty."

"And never my own?" Summers quietly asked, managing somehow to hold his temper.

Jeff was at once all contrition. "Of course. I'm sorry I said that, Will. But when I remember—well, then I forget myself. I am trying to forget, and it is hard. God knows how hard it is. You're right about the duty. But look, Will. The convention meets at Washington to-

morrow. Beyond doubt they will declare independence. Houston will be re-elected commander-in-chief, according to all reports, and he will set about forming a larger army. We need more than just a few volunteers. Wait a few more days. Wait until we hear from Washington. If Santa Anna is marching on Bexar, Houston knows it. Besides, the men in Bexar can hold that town for a month against the entire Mexican army."

"You're right about needing an army instead of just a few volunteers," Summers agreed. "I'll wait a few days to see what they do at the convention. Then I am going to Bexar."

"And I'll be with you," Buell answered.

For the first time Jeff saw Summers abandon the force of his quiet will and resort to storm.

"Damn it to hell!" he barked. "That's just what I don't want you to do!"

Jeff pitted his will against that of Summers. "And for once you'll see me do as I please," he said. "I know what is *my* duty, just as well as you know yours."

7

Summers waited too long. On the very day when the convention at Washington was declaring that "the people of Texas do now constitute a free, sovereign and independent republic," Santa Anna and General Cos, who had violated his parole, were storming the beleaguered Texans in the Alamo. And on the following Sunday morning, when Houston was leaving Washington to take command of the army at Gonzales, and at the hour when

the citizens of San Felipe, in answer to the mission bells, were starting for church to worship the Prince of Peace, Santa Anna was putting to the knife the last brave defender of the Alamo.*

Several days elapsed before a dust covered, spent rider rode into San Felipe with news of the butchery. The messenger came from Houston, now at Gonzales, and he carried an urgent call for the men of San Felipe to arm themselves and hasten to the defense of the new republic.

Summers and Buell were together on the street when the courier arrived. Every man in the group that gath-

*Many heroic fictions have been invented concerning the last acts of the defenders of the Alamo. One of the thinnest of these fictions is to the effect that Travis, in making up his mind to fight to the finish, drew a line in the dust with his sword and asked, "Who stays with me?" In response to this all the Texans jumped across the line and Bowie, stricken with typhoid-pneumonia, demanded that his cot be carried across the line. This is mock-heroics. It is a good story but it never happened. Every appeal which Travis had sent for aid carried his assertion that he would never surrender. "Victory or Death," were the words with which he closed his last appeal. He was not the type of commander to ask his troops if they wanted to stay. Again, flight was then impossible and they all knew it.

The facts alone are sufficient to lift a towering, permanent monument to the valor of those 182 brave defenders who faced Santa Anna's army of three thousand, successfully defended their position for eleven days, repulsed two attacks on the morning of March 6th, perished to the man in the third and final assault, and collected revenge in advance to the tune of over eight hundred Mexicans killed and wounded.

Many flimsy and colorful accounts have been given of the manner in which Col. Crockett, Travis, Bowie, Bonham, and others, met death. There were no surviving American eye-witnesses, and the Mexican reports are so at variance and so full of boastful lies (such as Santa Anna's report of the victory) that the cautious student finds it safer to put them aside and look to the fact that the defenders died fighting and sought no quarter. The wife of Lieut. Dickinson, her baby and a Negro boy were the only survivors. They were found hidden under mattresses in a small room of the fort and knew next to nothing of what had taken place during that brief assault. It is enough to know that every man died at his post and that their death lifted Texas from its apathy and lighted the beacon of liberty and independence.

ered around the rider at once became carriers of the news. In half an hour the town was buzzing like a hive of disturbed bees.

Summers was staggered. Lon Bullard, the gentle, the wise and the generous, rose up before him. How had he served friendship? Never again would this life furnish so loyal a friend. Crockett, too, stood before him, watching him with serious eyes that had lost all their twinkle. Behind them stood Travis, Bowie, and all that gallant company of determined men with whom he had ridden on their westward trek to death. It would be a long time before Texas again saw their like.

In a daze Summers turned his steps toward his office. Anger and vengeance could not yet lift themselves above the flood tide of sorrow and remorse.

Buell followed, in silence. His thoughts were not so much upon Bullard or the other men of that small command. He was thinking of Red Ruth. He, himself, had once been wounded by the type of wound that paralyzes but does not kill. Now his mind went back to the woman at Nacogdoches. There Red Ruth would wait, and wait, and wait. Through all the long years she would stand there at the wheel, her bright red hair changing to grey, and ever, as night came down, she would repeat to ears that hear but do not understand, "Round and round the little ball goes and where it stops nobody knows."

Jeff knew that only the heart stops. The ball rolls on.

Too dazed for action, he and Summers were still with their thoughts when Carolin came hurrying into the office. One glance at their set faces told her all.

"You have—heard," she said.

They nodded. Jeff turned and walked to the door, standing with his back to her.

"I know how you feel," she said, talking directly to Summers. "I know why you have stayed here when you thought you should go. Jeff told me. It is all my fault. I shouldn't have come until all this was over. But you can't stay any longer now. You must go—both of you."

Summers noticed that she was standing very erect, very determined. She seemed to be bracing herself for a blow.

Jeff passed through the door into the street.

"But you can't——" Summers began.

"Don't tell me what I can't do!" she interrupted. "I have no more rights than any other woman in Texas. I am not the only one who must be left behind."

"But—but, Carolin——" Words failed him. In her eyes there was no appeal for sympathy. She was equal to the hour. But she seemed so frail, so like a tall flower trying to hold up under the peltings of a gusty fall shower.

Somehow he managed to cross the room. He never knew just where he gained the courage to take her in his arms. For one brief moment she lifted her lips in invitation. Then her hands went out against his chest, pushing him away. She knew that all of her resolution would vanish once their lips met.

"No, Will—please! Not now. I—I couldn't give you up—after that. Please, Will! Can't you see I am trying—trying to be brave?"

He released her. "And when I come back?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes, yes! . . . When you come back."

Jeff stuck his head in the door. "There's a public meeting at the alcalde's office, Will," he called. "Coming?"

"Yes. I'm coming."

Carolyn put her hand against the door jamb for support as she watched them hurry down the street.



Chapter Seven

"REMEMBER THE ALAMO!"

I

THE WINGS of the wind would have been none too swift to suit Summers, Abel and Buell on their ride to Gonzales, but when they reached there it was to learn that the hard ride had been in vain. Houston, with a ragamuffin, untrained, undisciplined and poorly armed force totaling a little over three hundred, was preparing to evacuate Gonzales and fall back to the Colorado. He had already dispatched a messenger to Fannin ordering him to abandon the defense of Goliad and retreat to Victoria on the Guadalupe. Word had reached Houston that Santa Anna was moving eastward with a strong force of infantry, horse and artillery. No one knew his exact whereabouts. He might strike at any hour, and Houston was wise enough to know that the pitiable army of Texans, however thirsty for the blood of the butcher of the Alamo, would be trampled under by the first charge of Santa Anna's dragoons. The Texans were poorly equipped and there was no supporting artillery.

Gonzales was a town of tears and panic. Thirty-two men from the small town had perished in the Alamo. Wives were weeping and wringing their hands; fatherless children were groping for an understanding of what had befallen them; and every rifle in the ragged army was challenging Houston to stand and fight.

This was the condition when Summers, Jeff and Abel reached there. That night they became three more miserable units in a crestfallen handful of men who, representing the army of Texas, filled their mouths with bitter oaths as Houston ordered the retreat. They had but two wagons and two yoke of oxen for transporting supplies and ammunition. The man who came without provisions in his saddlebags or in a cotton sack stood an excellent chance to go hungry.

Santa Anna, drunk with the blood of his victory at the Alamo, had publicly announced that he would burn every American house in Texas. To rob him of this satisfaction, Houston appointed "Deaf" Smith and Summers as the leaders of a small rear guard who were to burn everything in the wake of the retreating army. All night long the army of Texas moved eastward, their trail marked by the flaming walls and roofs of homes that had seen joy and sorrow, want and plenty, privation and the bright flame of zeal.

Four days and nights the army moved eastward, their progress greatly delayed by the necessity of riding wide on both flanks to warn and bring in unprotected families. Santa Anna's code did not exempt the defenseless.

On the fourth day they reached the Colorado, crossed over and went into camp. Two days thereafter the rear guard scouts reported that a strong Mexican force under General Sesma was moving forward toward the river crossing. Houston at once began preparations to ambush them. The spirit of the men arose, but their enthusiasm was short-lived. The Mexicans, learning of the ambush, pitched camp on the opposite side of the river to await

reinforcements. The chance for ambush gone, Houston began to make plans for recrossing the river and engaging the enemy in open battle.

While these plans were being pushed to completion, two reports came to him that quenched the fire of his ardor and threw his command into uproar. The convention at Washington, hearing of his retreat, had moved the seat of government to Harrisburg. This move, on the part of the leaders, threw all of east Texas into unreasoning panic. If both the government and army were fleeing before Santa Anna, the people reasoned, then it was high time for the citizen to take flight.

But it was the second report that staggered Houston. A rider came from Goliad, spurring frantically into camp and shouting out that Fannin's entire command at Goliad had been captured and massacred to the man.

That night Houston did not sleep, and his men sat around their small camp fires, retelling again and again the story the rider had brought from Goliad. First the Alamo, now Goliad. What manner of beast was this Santa Anna? Was it his rule to give no quarter? What would happen to this motley crowd if they chanced to fall in his path? Doubtless Sesma, across the river, was awaiting his arrival. Here was their chance to even the score! They would cross the river in the morning and give the Mexicans a taste of their own medicine. An eye for an eye. Blood for blood.

So they talked throughout the night. But Houston had been doing some clear thinking. He decided to fall back to the Brazos and by such continued retreat lure the enemy further and further away from their base. Per-

haps Santa Anna might even divide his forces in his zeal to lay waste all Texas. At any rate, it was the one clear chance. To stand here would be to add another massacre to the blood red record of Santa Anna's advance.

When dawn came, Houston, red-eyed from lack of sleep but with his powerful shoulders squared to meet the blast of anger which he knew he was about to provoke, stalked before his paraded army and told them of his plan to strike camp and retreat to the Brazos.

The storm broke. What had been a mob of untrained men now became a mob in open rebellion. They shouted curses and swore they would not retreat another step.

"Look at him!" Abel growled to Summers. "He run out of Tennessee once and now he's fixin' to run clean out of Texas." He turned and shouted loud enough to be heard above the angry growls of the others. "Boys!" he called, "I stick right here. I come to fight, not to run. If I'd a-knowed the army was goin' to run plumb back to the Brazos I could a-stayed there and saved myself a lot of steps. I motion we stick right here and give 'em lead when they try to cross the river."

There was a shout of approval. Abel was voicing the will of every man present—save one. That one was the towering giant who stood so calmly before them, drawing his colored sash a little tighter about his middle and shifting his big hat to a more determined angle.

His voice rose above the others like the roar of a bull above the drone of bees. He offered no explanation; made no effort to tell them what he expected them to do. He told them what they were *going to do!* Only a few short, sharp sentences. Then he stood there, seeming to

have the ability to look into the eyes of every man in the command.

The growling ceased. Silently, in little groups, the men turned away and began to make ready for further retreat. Even Abel was silenced, and Summers knew that he had met a will stronger than his own.

2

The retreat to the Brazos was a way of sorrow. The spring rains began. Water fell in sheets. Creeks became rivers; the prairies were turned into bogs. The wagons and oxen were no sooner extricated from one mud hole than they forthwith mired down in another.

The countryside was in shambles. Every house had been abandoned, the owners fleeing eastward ahead of the retreating army. Beside the road was to be found bedding, trunks, kitchen ware, pieces of household furniture—all cast from over-loaded wagons by frantic settlers who had tried to save all and were now willing to cast all aside in an effort to save their lives. Many of the wagons and ox carts preceding the army were driven by women. Their husbands were in the army behind, or had perished at the Alamo or at Goliad. And many a man in Houston's army, coming in sight of his own home, saw that the door swung wide open and that all he had worked to gain—cattle, hogs, chickens, and the house itself—must be left in the path of the pursuing enemy, while somewhere ahead of the army his wife and children were goading weary oxen into still greater effort. Under such conditions, it took a brave man to

stay behind with the army. Fortunately, many of them knew the quality of courage possessed by their women who, somewhere ahead, were plodding through the dark nights, and the lowering days, their long bull whips cracking over the backs of lagging oxen while their lips spoke courage and crooned melodies to frightened, crying children.

The army that trailed these refugees was sullen and angry. The man who rode at their head had once seen a star rising and had made prophecy. His speeches had been phrased in words of fire. Now, it seemed, the rains had quenched his fire; the sodden prairies sucked at his feet until he no longer walked like a giant.

Perhaps he was lost. Perhaps the clouds had blotted out the star.

3

Summers was not of the bravest when it came to the question of Carolin's safety, and his worry changed to fear when word reached the army that the citizens of San Felipe were fleeing the town. He at once called Jeff and Abel into conference. They were solemn and depressed. Summers knew their distress was as great as his own.

"You can't stay with us any longer, Jeff," he began. "You must ride ahead and take Carolin up to Washington. I would say to Harrisburg, but Santa Anna is south of us and I'm afraid he is aiming at the new seat of government. To go there might be jumping out of the kettle into the fire."

"I'm glad you think I should go," Jeff answered. "I've been worried to death about her. Of course I hate to leave, but I can't stand to see her there alone when everyone is moving out."

"Old Sam says he's goin' to make a stand at the Brazos," Abel offered.

"He said the same at the Colorado," Summers answered dourly. "I've about lost faith in his standing ability. Besides, that would leave Carolin within gunshot of the battle and we can't expect Santa Anna to respect women. It's time to act! Abel will go with you——"

"Now, Will!" Abel protested. "I've bin keepin' my powder dry in all this rain fer shootin', not fer runnin'. I figger to——"

"This is no time for argument, Abel!" Summers' voice was crisp. "If there is going to be any shooting, which I doubt, you'll get your share of it. I want you to go back with Jeff. Go out to the farm and get the wagon and the oxen, load up as much of Carolin's stuff as you can haul and take the road to Washington. Stay with Jeff until you get them to Washington. Then you can come back and join us—if Houston makes a stand. If you get word that he has fallen back beyond the Brazos, then light out for Nacogdoches. In that case, I'll join you along the road. I don't propose to stay with him a step beyond the Brazos."

"Let me git this straight, Will. If Old Sam crosses the Brazos I'm to stay with Jeff till you ketch up. That'll mean we're headed out of Texas."

"Yes. We can't make a stand alone—and I'm tired of running."

"It's kinda like desertin', ain't it?" Abel asked.

"I don't care what it's like!" Summers retorted. "Some of us must go. Either you go, or I will."

"You might do better than me," Abel suggested.

Lacking logic with which to meet this argument, Summers resorted to flattery.

"It's a question of the best man for the job, Abel. I don't know of any man who can get more miles out of a yoke of oxen than you can. Buck and Bell will sulk on me. You can keep the wheels rolling."

"I'm tolerable handy with a prod," Abel admitted. "Do you want me to take any of our stuff?"

"No. If we retreat beyond the river I'm through with Texas. Save all the space for Carolin."

"And Aunt Chloe," Abel added, grinning. "She'll take up a right smart room."

4

When Houston came in sight of San Felipe he immediately announced his intention of moving north along the river to Groce's Ferry. Mutiny at once flamed up. Many of the men considered it another ruse for continuing the retreat. Houston had declared that he would not retreat beyond the Brazos, but had said nothing about retreating northward. It was a trick. A cowardly trick. The leaders pointed out that here was the place to make the stand. When Houston turned a deaf ear to this plan, a hundred and fifty men refused to follow him further. One group elected to remain at the San Felipe crossing while a second group moved down to Fort Bend.

Houston was a commander without authority to enforce command. With set lips he ignored the rebellion and marched northward. Even in retreat he had a quality of leadership that made men follow. Five hundred growling, cursing, but still loyal men followed him to Groce's and went into camp.

The downpour of rain continued. The camp at Groce's became first a quagmire, then a lake. The men were continually moving to higher ground until at last the camp became a small island surrounded by the coffee colored backwater from the swollen river.

Houston, deaf to all complaints and favoring himself least of all, sternly went about the business of drilling his men and trying to whip them into an organization responsive to command. But his men had come to fight, not to spend hours drilling on a small island cut off from the world. Somewhere beyond the turgid water of the river their wives and children were fleeing east, north, south—anywhere but westward. It was a sorry time for drilling.

The rains never ceased. The clouds never broke. Gloom settled over the army. What man could see a star when even the sun was held in thrall by the darkest clouds that had ever lowered over Texas?

Every report that reached the army increased the gloom. Word came that Santa Anna was at the crossing at San Felipe, only to find the town in flames. Again the fleeing citizens had robbed him of one of his chief delights. With pillage denied him, he turned south to make a thrust at Harrisburg. He was tired of chasing a jack-rabbit that hadn't the nerve to stand and fight. He

would raze Harrisburg and stamp out the rebel leaders.

Houston smiled as the army growled and clamoured for pursuit. It was all working out just as he had planned. Santa Anna had grown contemptuous. Next he would become careless. He was working farther and farther away from his base and his forces were now divided and widely separated.

The hour had struck. Houston went before his army with a new gleam in his eye. Now they would see Old Sam in action. The hare would become the hound. But, wisely, he gave them no word of his plans. There were too many men deserting for him to trust such a precious message to tongues that might to-morrow find expression in some place where eager ears would carry the news to Santa Anna.

Keeping his plans to himself, he spent two days in crossing the swollen river, making use of a steamboat which he commandeered for that purpose.

The crossing of the river filled Summers with misgivings. Houston offered the army no explanation of the move; gave no hint of his purpose. Many of the men thought it was the beginning of another long retreat, but there was something about the quiet force with which Houston now moved that caused Summers to believe that this silent, wilful man was preparing to draw the sword. If so, Abel would be left out. If word of the move reached Washington, Abel and Jeff would consider it evidence of flight and would at once set out for Nacogdoches.

While Summers was debating in his mind whether to remain with the army or, as he had promised, leave it

and rejoin Abel and Jeff at Washington, Houston ordered him to report as orderly. An hour after Summers reported, Houston started the march eastward toward Donohue's. It was at this place that the road forked, one road continuing eastward to the Trinity and thence north to Nacogdoches, the right hand road turning south to Harrisburg.

Summers, now acting as orderly, decided to remain with the army until they reached Donohue's. There, where the road forked, Old Sam would be forced to disclose his plan. Then the army would know whether they were in for a fight or a foot race.

Two pieces of artillery, six pounders, sent as a gift by the citizens of Cincinnati, Ohio, reached the army just as they had completed the crossing of the Brazos. The men promptly christened them "The Twin Sisters." Now at last Old Sam had his artillery, the soldiers said among themselves, and if he lacked the courage to use them and did not follow the road to Harrisburg someone was going to get a shot in the back.

As the army came within sight of the fork in the road at Donohue's, Wharton, who had brought the six pounders from Velasco, rode up to Houston and said:

"Sir, these men are in no mood for further retreat. All the rifles of this command are eager for a fight."

Houston pressed his lips the tighter, gave his sash a determined hitch and answered not a word.

"They are ready to mutiny," Wharton warned.

Houston rode on in silence. Summers, who rode immediately behind, was one who could understand and appreciate the force of silence.

"If you take the fork to the Trinity," Wharton continued, "some of these men who have followed you so long will turn their rifles on *you*, sir."

Houston gave him a look of eloquent contempt. Summers, seeing this look, knew then that a tall man was riding at the head of the army. But Wharton was not yet satisfied.

"These men have a right to know your plans," he continued. "They want to know where you are going."

"Toward glory—glory enough for them all," Houston answered.

At that moment the advance guard reached the forks of the road. Without a moment's hesitation they swung south. Houston's eyes twinkled as he shot a quick glance at Wharton.

"There is your answer, sir," he said. "Perhaps the men will now save their powder for Mexicans—who deserve it more than I do."

A wild shouting went up as the ranks realized that at last the retreat had become an advance. Maybe Old Sam had been right after all, they reasoned.

Summers did not join in the shouting, although he was as eager as any for combat. He had a score to settle as great as any of the others. If only Abel were here he could find heart for the shouting. But in all probability word would reach Washington that Houston was retreating to the Trinity. In that case, Abel and Jeff would start back along the road to Nacogdoches.

For the next two days Summers kept his eyes to the rear, hoping for the sight of a big-boned chestnut galloping along under a slouching, bearded rider.

5

In the meanwhile, Santa Anna was having a glorious time. He had burned Harrisburg. Then, confident that Houston was retreating toward the Trinity, he marched to New Washington and began amusing himself by setting fire to the homes of American colonists and making forays on their live stock. While he was thus employed one of his scouts brought the news that a force of Texans had appeared at Lynch's Ferry and were preparing to march against the town.

Santa Anna was happy to learn that at least a few Texans had deserted the jack-rabbit and had come to offer him more cups of blood like those which had been drunk at the Alamo and at Goliad.

In high spirits he set fire to the town and moved northward to trap the small band of foolish men who, his scouts declared, had crossed Buffalo Bayou and established a camp in a grove of trees near the junction of the bayou with the San Jacinto.

Reaching the prairie that extended in front of the position held by the Texans, he ordered a halt near the southern edge of this open ground and pitched camp with his back to a wide marsh which extended to San Jacinto Bay. Having established his position, he sent forward a single piece of artillery, supported by a detachment of cavalry and infantry, to force the Texans from the woods into the open prairie where more fun could be had during the slaughter.

He had sent his men forward to rout out rabbits and they met a bear. From the cover of the woods the "Twin Sisters" greeted the advancing Mexicans. Un-

appreciative of the salutation and somewhat surprised thereby, the Mexicans retreated.

Santa Anna now lost his lust for battle. He had but one piece of artillery. The enemy had two. He began looking anxiously for the arrival of reinforcements under General Cos. He began to wonder, too, as night came on, if he could have fallen into error in his guess that the jack-rabbit was retreating beyond the Trinity. The Napoleon of the West, as he chose to call himself, began to have faint stirrings of misgiving.

6

Houston had reached his position by marching night and day. Again and again he had rolled up his sleeves to lend his strength to that of his staggering men as they sweated and grunted at the mud-clogged wheels of wagons and guns. He had won in his race to reach Lynch's Ferry ahead of Santa Anna and thus cut off the dictator's only chance of escape. Now the Mexicans were trapped, but Houston's exhausted men were too tired to spring the trap. They had to content themselves with repulsing Santa Anna's feeble thrust. This, however, so enheartened them that strength returned and they chafed under the restraint of Houston's inactivity.

Night closed down with the leaders and the men clamouring for a night attack. Houston counseled only with himself. He knew that the men needed rest and food. The hot fever of their excitement was not strength. Even when warned that Santa Anna might at any moment be reinforced by the arrival of Cos, Houston shook his head and held his tongue.

Morning came and the men at once began preparations

for battle. Hours passed and still Houston made no move. The men again began their growling. Sure enough, the old fool had waited too long. Cos had arrived. Now it would be just like him to order a retreat.

Summers thought he saw the trick Houston was planning. He felt sure it was the commander's plan to remain inactive until the enemy was lulled into a feeling of security. Then he would strike quickly.

So thinking, Summers made his way through the camp, openly championing the delay. There was no man reckless enough to accuse this tall, powerful Tennessean of lacking courage. They had seen too much of his strength on the long march, and many of them had seen him in action at Bexar. They listened to him, even though their patience was short.

Houston's position in the grove of trees was well concealed from the eyes of the enemy, while he could observe all that went on in their camp. Near two o'clock in the afternoon the Texans saw that the Mexicans were beginning to fortify their position. Houston at once sent for "Deaf" Smith.

"Smith," he said when the squat, burly man entered the tent, "I am picking you for a job I would not trust to another. There is just one way out of this pocket—Vince's Bridge. Select some man to go with you, take axes and ride to Vince's Creek and destroy that bridge."

Smith's eyes lit up. "That's our only way of escape, General."

"*We* will have no need for escape," Houston answered dryly.

Smith beamed. "It looks like a fight at last."

"It is. The future of Texas will be decided here before sundown. You'd better hurry back if you want in the fight. Take one other man to help you."

"I'll take that man Summers, who has been actin' as your orderly," Smith replied. "He's got the only horse that can keep up with me on the way there or back. Go slow, General. I've rid a long ways to miss out on this."

7

At three o'clock Houston ordered his officers to parade their commands. The right wing was under Colonel Millard, the center under Colonel Burleson, the left wing under Colonel Sherman. The "Twin Sisters" occupied the position on the right of the center, and the mounted men, under Lamar, ranged on the extreme right flank.

When they were formed, Houston mounted his mud-splashed white horse and rode down the length of his ragged and dirty command. His blanket was gone from his shoulders, lost somewhere on the line of march, and the incessant rains had faded the bright colors in his sash. It was nothing more than a soiled, tattered band. His sabre hung suspended from buckskin thongs and his fawn-colored trousers were stuffed into boots that bore the caked mud of many a muddy mile. But they had carried a giant from seclusion to this field of decision and glory.

"Forward!" rang out his sharp, incisive command.

On the left the clear notes of a fife struck up the tune, "Come to the Bower I Have Shaded for You." The "Twin Sisters" rolled forward, bumping and rumbling. There was the quick step of hurrying feet and the clat-

ter of hoofs as the impatient cavalry swung into the advance.

"Hold your fire until you can pick your man!" Houston shouted as he rode down the line. "Hold your fire!"

Just as the cavalry unit under Lamar swung out from behind the trees masking their advance, "Deaf" Smith and Summers came dashing up to join them. Their horses were a welter of foam and mud. Smith was yelling like an Indian.

"The Bridge is down! The Bridge is down! You've got to lick 'em!"

Summers, spurring along the line, echoed the shout, "The Bridge is down! The Bridge is down! Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad!"

All along the advancing line the cry was taken up. "Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad!"

The attack had come at the very hour when the Mexicans had least suspected it. Many of them, including General Santa Anna, were taking an afternoon siesta. A considerable number of Mexican cavalry were leading their horses to water. Surprised by the suddenness of the attack, they rushed to their feeble fortifications and fired aimlessly at the advancing line. Several Texans, forgetting Houston's order, opened in reply.

Houston wheeled in his saddle. "Hold your fire, God damn you! I told you to hold your fire!"

Summers could hold his fire but could not control the fire of vengeance within him. He sank his spurs into his tired horse and like a man made mad by torturing memories rode full at the enemy position. Infantry and horse quickly closed the gap and when almost upon the Mexi-

cans the Texans opened fire. It was a volley at point blank range. The Mexicans fell like grain before the sickle. No time for reloading now. The Texans clubbed their muskets and skulls were smashed like nuts under a heavy hammer. It was grim, close work.

"Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad!" Between the swings of their clubbed rifles the men found time to keep up the cry.

All along the line the dazed Mexicans cast aside their guns, fell to their knees and cried out: "Me no Alamo! Me no Goliad!"

Crack! went their skulls with a sound like the splintering of seasoned pine. That would silence their lying tongues!

Summers was riding up and down the line, his rifle swinging in great arcs as he beat down all in his path. He was remembering the Alamo. He was adding to the red toll which Bullard and Crockett had taken before the weight of numbers bore them down.

Hard Cash, nostrils dilated and red with the strain of the hard ride to Vince's Bridge, caught the spirit of his master's vengeance. He became the coal black mount of Death.

A small group of Mexican soldiers and officers were attempting to rally on a small knoll a few yards back of the advance position. Summers saw them, as did a score of Lamar's horse, and with the unity of purpose that comes to men in moments of high action, they swung their horses into line and swept over the knoll as frightened cattle would beat down an ant hill.

Directly in Summers' path one man, in the uniform of

a Mexican officer, realizing that nothing could stop that charge, fired wildly with his pistol and took to his heels. Summers swung wide to pursue him. The man cast one frightened look backward. Then it was that Summers recognized him. It was Gant, the betrayer of Sally, the plotter, the schemer, the philanderer, and now a renegade in the uniform of a Mexican officer, running like a rabbit to escape death under the heels of a thundering black Nemesis.

A riderless horse, with bridle reins flying, came galloping across the field at an angle that would intersect Gant's line of flight. Gant had one hope left—that he could catch the reins of that horse.

Summers' rifle had been empty since that first charge, and there was now no time for reloading. As he drove his spurs into Hard Cash's flanks a hundred memories flashed through his mind. Before him, in the flesh it seemed, stood lovely Sally Ransome, her eyes wide with wonderment and dismay.

Summers' sank deep his spurs and grasped his rifle by the very end of the long barrel. If only Jeff were here in his place! If only Jeff could see what was about to take place at the end of the long trail.

Gant, running and stumbling, threw up his hands to catch the reins of the riderless horse. They closed upon them and the horse, brought to a sudden stop, swung around in a wide half circle.

That moment a tornado of vengeance struck. Summers' rifle, swinging in a great arc, descended on Gant's head like the hammer of angered Thor. There was a splintering crash, a flinging upward and outward of arms

as Gant's fingers released their hold on the bridle reins. Like a reed he went down under the pounding hoofs of Hard Cash.

Summers cast one backward look as he swung to rejoin the unit that had swept over the knoll and were turning to seek further opposition. The outstretched form in the tall grass lay very, very still. The riderless horse, again free, galloped away.

Now, within ten minutes of the beginning of the attack, all the Mexicans left alive were in wild, frantic flight. They sought escape over the prairie, and they ran back into the marsh where, bogged down to their waists, they made easy targets for the Texans who seemed never to tire of that vengeful chant, "Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad!"

Lamar's cavalry unit rode pell-mell through the camp and then took up the individual pursuit of those seeking escape across the prairie toward the crossing where once had stood Vince's Bridge.

Houston, shot in the ankle and with his horse down, was being carried from the field. But not for a second did the fighting and the slaughter cease.

The battle had begun at sundown. Before the color had faded from the western sky the grass and flowers of the prairie were drinking freshets of blood. Vince's Creek ran red as the western sky. Eight hundred dead and wounded Mexicans had paid for blood with blood.

But Santa Anna had lost all appetite for it. The butcher of the Alamo, his heart turned from stone to a tremulous, pulsing thing that hammered like the heart of a frightened hare, was crawling through the tall

grass seeking escape. Belly down in the wet grass, "the Napoleon of the West" crawled from his Waterloo toward Vince's Bridge.

All night long galloping horsemen sought for him. The skies were clear now. Every man could see the bright star of independence rising. But not until Santa Anna was captured would it become a star of the first magnitude.

Over the prairies Summers ranged, in company with others from Lamar's command, urging their spent horses to still greater efforts. Lying in the tall grass, Santa Anna could hear the clippety-clop, clippety-clop of hoofs that would glory in riding him down.

From a camp fire under the trees on the banks of Buffalo Bayou came the clear, soft notes of a single fife, playing over and over the one tune known by the fifer, "Come to the Bower I Have Shaded for You."

Santa Anna heard the hated, alien tongues that were lifted in triumphant chorus. He heard, too, the ranging hoof beats of the horses of the more energetic Texans who would join voices in a still louder chorus could they but come upon the butcher of the Alamo.

Under a tree, where a camp fire burned brightly, Old Sam Houston, child of destiny, sat nursing a wounded ankle and listening with grim satisfaction to the acclaim of those who were now willing to admit that he had led them to a field where there was glory enough for all.



Chapter Eight

"PIONEERS! O PIONEERS!"

I

AT SUNDOWN, on the sixth day after the defeat and subsequent capture of Santa Anna, Summers was riding northward from San Felipe toward Washington. The news of the victory at San Jacinto had spread rapidly. All day long he had met wagons returning along the road to the homes which the colonists had so hastily abandoned. The road was full of mud holes and a dozen times during the day Summers had stopped to put his shoulder to the wheel of a bogged-down wagon.

From each of these drivers he sought information concerning Carolin, Jeff and Abel, but it was late in the afternoon before he came across one driver who could give him anything definite. Yes, he had seen them at Washington, and so far as he knew they were still there. The man especially remembered the tall, bearded fellow who became so loudly profane when he heard of the victory at San Jacinto.

With a light heart Summers pressed on. Thank God they had not been foolish enough to start back to San Felipe!

The prairie to the west was swallowing the red sun as he topped the last rise south of Caney Creek. Half way out across the bottom he saw another wagon, bogged down, and the driver was belaboring the floundering

oxen. The light was none too good, the lowlands being blanketed in the soft purple lake of evening, but Summers' ears caught the sound of a familiar voice rising above the crack of a long bull whip.

"Rise, Buck! Rise, Bell!"

It was Abel, standing knee deep in the mud as he cracked his whip and tugged at one of the mud-packed wheels.

Summers sent Hard Cash flying down the road leading to the bottom. Abel, seeing him coming, left off with his labors and took a few steps forward to meet him. Carolin was sitting on the pine seat, framed against old Chloe, who stood just behind her. Chloe was not trusting her weight to so thin a board.

"What in the world are you doing here?" Summers demanded of Abel as he rode alongside.

"Tryin' to git out of this mud hole," Abel retorted. "What do you think? What's the road like ahead?"

"It's high ground. But you can't go ahead, you fool!"

"Why not, please?" It was Carolin speaking. Her flowered calash was pushed back far enough for Summers to see the light of determination in her eyes.

Summers wheeled his horse alongside the front wheel.

"Excuse my temper," he apologized, "but I wasn't expecting you here. Where's Jeff?"

"He's ridden back along the road to get help. Why do you say we can't go on?"

Abel answered the question. "Because he wants to direct ever'thing. He's the same feller who sent me up here and then rode south with Houston without sendin' me word whether he was still runnin' or fixin' to

fight. Excuse me, ma'm, but he's ornery and bull-headed."

"Why can't we go on, Will?" Carolin repeated. "All the others are going back."

"Didn't you hear that San Felipe was burned? There's nothing left of the town."

"Yes, we heard that. And we also heard that Houston had captured Santa Anna. San Felipe will build again. Jeff said so. Think, Will! There isn't a family along this road that hasn't some sick member in need of a doctor."

"Nonsense!" Summers retorted. "Let's get out of here, Abel. We've got to turn back."

"Will! Just a minute!" There was command in Carolin's voice. She sat very erect. "I'm not turning back! I know what this country has cost all of us. We have paid too much to turn back."

That moment Summers knew he had met another will greater than his own. One foot left a stirrup, found the wagon wheel, and he slid from the saddle to the seat beside her. His hand closed over hers. Aunt Chloe was seized by a desire to look out of the back of the wagon, and Abel took a sudden interest in a clogged rear wheel.

"Can't you see, Carolin, how utterly impossible it is?" Summers pleaded. "You can't stand such hardship. It's *you* I'm thinking about. Can't you see the way is too long and too hard—for you, dear?"

She couldn't see. Everything was too blindingly bright. She could only feel his lips, and nothing else seemed of any consequence . . .

"It isn't too long—with you, Will," she whispered at

last as her fingers ran through his matted brown hair. "Look!" she pointed to the west where the evening star hung like a flashing topaz in a great jewel box of red velvet. "Look, Will! The first star. Our star. See how bright it is. Make a wish." Her lips began repeating the old rhyme that had come down from antiquity.

*"Star light, star bright,
First star I see to-night . . ."*

"Hey, Will!" Abel called. "If you'll git down offen that seat and put your shoulder to this wheel maybe we can git out on the higher ground while there's still light." His bull whip cracked with decision. "Rise, Buck! Rise, Bell!"





